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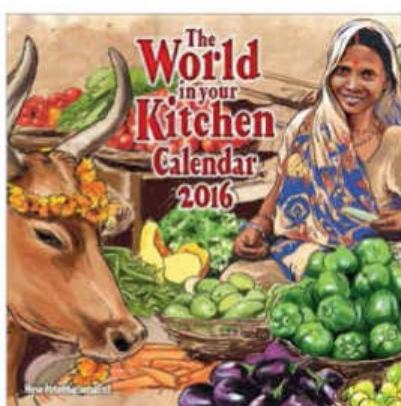
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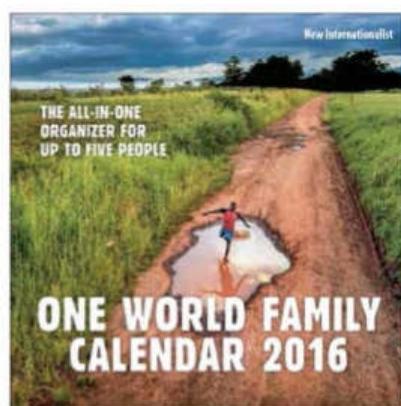
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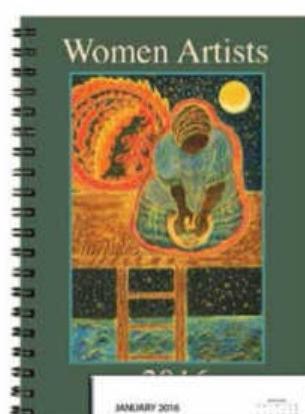
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Syria – the good guys



Before the war, the best way to enjoy Syria was in complete ignorance. That's what I did in 2005, when I arrived in Damascus as a tourist. For two weeks I explored the country's Roman ruins and medieval markets, enthusing about the sophistication of the food and the friendliness of the people. Syria, as my guidebook put it, was 'the Middle East's best kept secret'.

It was not until the following year, when I returned to Damascus to live, that I started to see that Syria had secrets of its own. Buildings from which Syrians averted their eyes. Jails from which no one emerged. To walk these streets, as writer Rana Kabbani has said, was 'to walk on pavements that were the ceilings of basements where political prisoners hung upside down by their feet'.

As my naïveté diminished, so my admiration for the Syrian people increased. After they rebelled against the regime of Bashar al-Assad in 2011, I followed their progress closely through the blogs, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds where activists debate the revolution, the war, and the ongoing struggle to build a better Syria.

Their stories deserve to be far more widely known, and this magazine is a contribution towards that end. In putting it together, I have relied on the insight of Syrians far more expert than me, as well as the contributions of Syrian writers, artists and activists represented in these pages. My thanks and respect to them all.

Elsewhere in the issue, French economist Edouard Tétreaux urges Pope Francis to take a stand against 'insane money and alienating technologies' when he visits the UN headquarters later this month. ■

DANIEL SILAS ADAMSON
for the New Internationalist Co-operative
newint.org

STOP PRESS

As this magazine went to print, Mazen Darwish was released from prison pending the verdict in his case on 21 August.

This month's contributors include:



Shahidul Alam is a photographer, writer, curator and human rights activist in Bangladesh. He set up the award-winning Drik agency and the celebrated school of photography Pathshala, and is the director of the Chobi Mela festival.



Yara Badr is a former director of the Syrian Center for Media and Free Expression. She now lives in exile, in Lebanon, and writes on culture for *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*. She won the Ilaria Alpi award for brave female journalists in 2012.



Born in Damascus in 1980, **Tamman Azzam** trained at the Faculty of Fine Arts, with a focus on oil painting. He now uses digital media (see pages 10 & 13) to create visual composites of the conflict in Syria.



Hania Mourtada is a Syrian journalist living in exile who works for The Syria Campaign advocacy group. She has written for *The New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *Time* magazine and other publications. thesyriacampaign.org

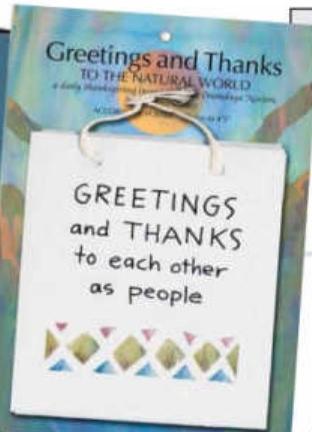
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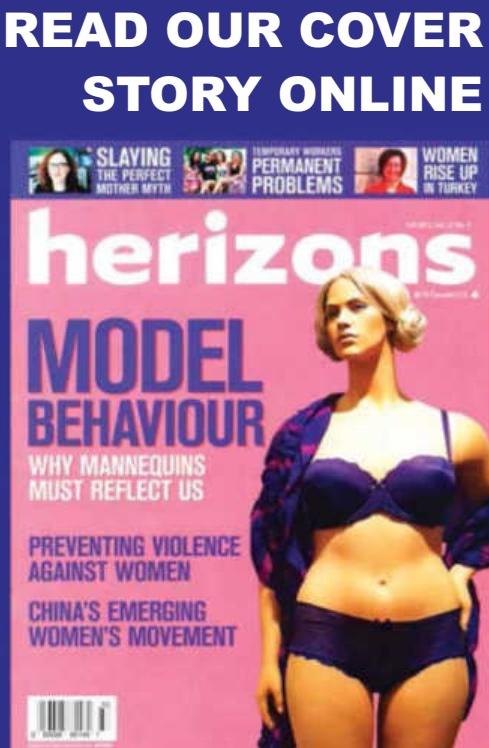
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Praise, blame and all points in between? Give us your feedback.

The **New Internationalist** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They might be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Letters should be sent to letters@newint.org or to your local NI office. Please remember to include a town and country for your address.



What's in a name

There is indeed an alternative to capitalism (**NI 484**).

This would involve extending the idea of the commons and making the resources of the planet the common property of all the people. Organizing production to satisfy people's needs. A true world community without classes or rulers or government. No prices, no wages, but free access to goods and services. A framework within which environmental issues and ideas of 'degrowth' can be decided on democratically.

It doesn't matter whether this is called Socialism or Communism (or even Anarchism). But it's the only practical alternative to keeping wages and profits, which would mean keeping capitalism.

Paul Bennett Manchester, England

Stuff and capitalism

The Left seems to be succumbing to the myth that all humanity's ills originate in capitalism. Rid ourselves of this troublesome system and an equitable and sustainable world awaits. Simplistic solutions are always seductive, and capitalism makes an excellent scapegoat, but even though getting rid of it may be a good thing, the root problem isn't capitalism. It's people.

People want stuff. They want a nice car and nice clothes. They want a computer, a TV and an iPhone. They want

tropical foods and tropical vacations. And they want capitalism because no economic system has ever surpassed it at providing the wealth necessary to buy lots of stuff, or produced so much stuff with such relentless efficiency.

The great challenges facing humanity can be met and overcome without trashing capitalism. Consider what Western society has accomplished in the last 250 years. We have ended slavery, enfranchised whole populations, emancipated women, and established universal education and medical care. Each of these is a magnificent achievement in itself, rarely if ever achieved in all previous history, and all were achieved compatibly with capitalism.

If all these things could be achieved alongside capitalism, so can the problems we face today. This will involve convincing a critical mass of citizens of the seriousness of the problems, as well as weaning them off consumerism – the opiate of the people. That might be the greatest challenge of all.

Bill Longstaff Calgary, Canada

Nourish the future

Congratulations on **NI 484**. The only surprising omission was that there was no mention of population in the crisis that we face. Most of the assumptions that the global economy is based on can be traced to the Enlightenment, the most crucial of these being that nature is infinite and need not be included in price calculations. For a global population of around 500 million, this was a workable solution to a difficult problem. Any resource availability calculation would maybe have suggested it was 500 years before things ran out – not a pressing problem. With a population of 7 billion that very same resource would last just over 35 years. The cohort that must solve this issue is roaming the planet now and the one

that is in power must recognize that time is fast running out. While 'What should we stand for?' provided some excellent principles, the fundamental problem is quite simple: we need to reinvent the economy to reward activities that nourish the future rather than those that destroy it.

Harold Forbes London, England

Proportion and balance

I was surprised at your silence on the fundamentalisms of the third Abrahamic faith (**NI 483**). I am not sure why you decided not to cover this aspect. Similarly for Buddhism. The disproportionate coverage of Islam raises questions. Kindly display a sense of balance.

Zaid Bhan Zurich, Switzerland

Different narratives

Congratulations to Robert Parenteau on his exposure of the fundamentalist nature of neoliberal economics (**NI 483**). The lack of recognition that this is a belief system means the debate has been closed down. Standing as Green Party candidate at the General Election, we panel members on the local BBC *Question Time* were asked by the political commentator: 'Do we have a moral responsibility to balance the books?' I responded that I had not considered bookkeeping to be a moral issue apart from the obvious prohibition against dishonesty. I pointed out that homelessness and hundreds of thousands of people relying on food banks in the sixth-richest country in the world seemed far more immoral and worthy of consideration.

We need to change the neoliberal narrative, not join it. Telling stories like Parenteau does is far better than accepting the language of the dominant economic belief system. Church leaders have started to tell the story from a different viewpoint. Now we need politicians who are willing to do so.

Sandra Walmsley Welling, England

Wide world of fundamentalism

It is simplistic and unhelpful to associate fundamentalism so closely with religion, as was done in **NI 483**. We all have beliefs and values that affect our decisions and behaviour, and it is foolish to think that only religiously inspired values can be damaging.

If fundamentalism means believing that society as a whole should be forced to live according to your values, and vilifying those who disagree with you, then some atheists, feminists, greenies and political supporters would be classified as fundamentalist. This kind of 'fundamentalism' is, I believe, unhelpful – whatever the cause being advanced.

The world needs people who are passionately committed to what they believe and who are prepared to make sacrifices in order to put those beliefs into practice and defend them. Open-mindedness and tolerance are not incompatible with passionately holding on to distinct values and beliefs. It is not the strength of opinion that makes one a fundamentalist, but an unwillingness to treat with respect those with whom one disagrees. Unfortunately, that characteristic can be found even among those who are vehemently secularist.

Fiona McLean Mont Albert North, Australia

Taking issue

Re *Agenda* article 'Cementing Gaza's suffering' (**NI 483**): brilliant; however, it piqued me that Operation Protective Edge was referred to as a '51-day war'.

Unfortunately 72 Israelis lost their lives but this must be contrasted with 2,220 Palestinians who died, according to the UN, the majority of whom were civilians.

If a child slaps me and I then run that child over with my car I can hardly say I had been in a 'fight'. Likewise Operation Protective Edge was not a 'war'.

Harry McCourt Banbridge, Ireland

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the **New Internationalist**.

Breaking down

A mishap on the road is a blessing in disguise for RUBY DIAMONDE.

I'm on the road again, in the
northern Central African Republic. It's hot, the sky is clear and the route is beautiful: a red dust track with dense bush either side that winds all the way to the border with Sudan.

I'm on the back of a motorbike, driven by my great friend Eddy, a local priest with a wicked sense of humour who knows this remote region area of CAR like the palm of his hand. Eddy has been based at the Catholic Mission in the nearby town of N'délé for two years now. Whenever I find the time to go north, he and I head off to explore local villages, and to enjoy the remote scenery where few vehicles ever pass. The dust track rises, then falls; but suddenly the bike skids, throwing me to one side. As I try to regain my seat Eddy curses, the bike skids again and we both fall. My leg burns as it scrapes along small stones on the track. I clutch it, howling in pain.

Eddy scrabbles towards me. 'Oh no, you're injured! Let me look.'

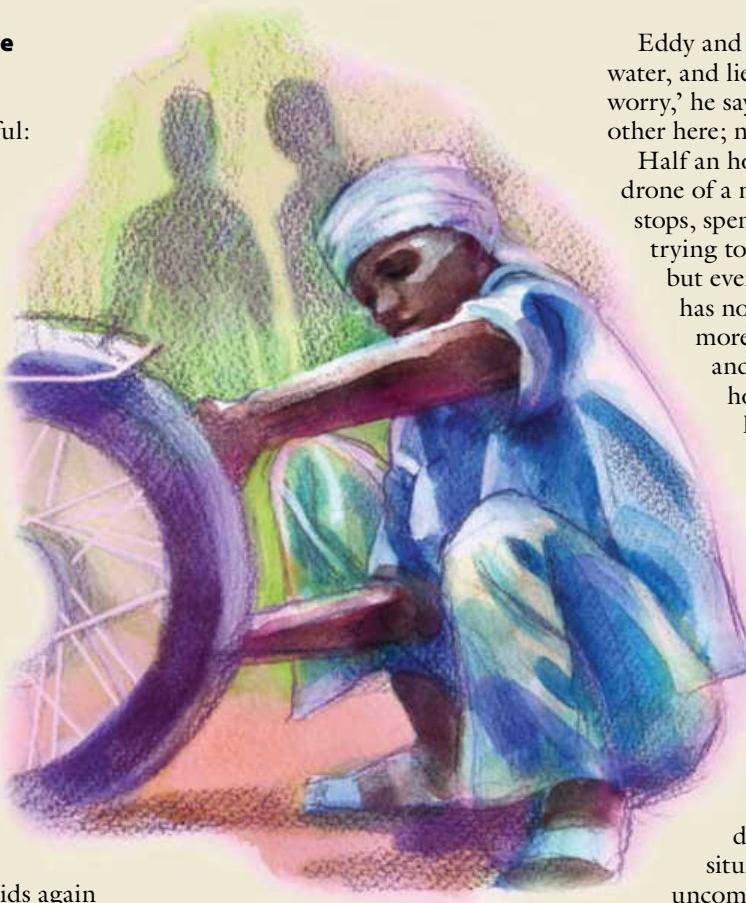
I'm wearing cut-off jeans, with no protection at all. But I'm OK; my leg is badly bruised and grazed, but not broken. Eddy is all right, too. We sit in the dust and reassure each other. 'I've never had an accident before,' he says, 'I hope the bike is still working.'

We dust each other down. The bike seems fine. We mount carefully, my leg stinging when I move, making me wince. We drive on for a few minutes, but something is wrong. Eddy slows down, kills the engine and hangs his head.

'We have a puncture.'

He has a hand pump, but we realize the back wheel inner tube has burst.

'What are we going to do?' I ask him, suddenly anxious. We're



stranded in the bush, miles from any village, or phone network. There are rebels out here with guns and machetes. Desperate men in search of food, water and, sometimes, women.

'There isn't anything to do but wait for another motorbike driver who might have a spare part,' he says quietly. 'Come and sit down in the shade.'

He gathers handfuls of leaves and we lie down at the side of the track, our heads resting on the leaves. Birds circle above, the bush hums and crackles. Eddy jokes that this is a major route north and I try to relax. We're going to be here for hours.

The first man to pass is on a bicycle, heading back to N'délé, who stops and tries to help. He has no spare parts, but says as soon as he reaches town he'll send a local mechanic to assist us, then peddles off, his bike wobbling.

Eddy and I drink our tepid bottled water, and lie down again. 'Don't worry,' he says, 'local people help each other here; no-one will harm us.'

Half an hour later we hear the drone of a motorbike. The driver stops, spends a good half hour trying to mend the puncture, but eventually gives up as he has no spare inner tube. Two more men on bicycles pass, and also do their best. Their home is more than 100 kilometres away, deep in the bush; their clothes are ragged, they are carrying machetes that they use for work, and they are both very thin, and kind. I give them some money for food on their journey and they say: 'Thank you Madam, now we will eat today.'

I start to feel differently about our situation: thirsty, hot and uncomfortable, but no longer in fear of who will pass by.

Another hour or so, and a young man, his face wrapped in a scarf against the dust, slows down his motorbike, nods a greeting, then opens a bag of tools. He's on his way to Sudan, and has a spare inner tube, new in its box. It cost him the equivalent of \$20, but we don't have that much money with us. No problem, he says, we can pay him next time he comes to N'délé. He and Eddy exchange numbers, then he kneels in the dust and fits the inner tube like a pro.

I thank him with all my heart; he nods, smiles, mounts his motorbike and is gone.

The bike works perfectly, and as we roar back home I know that breaking down here today wasn't all bad. I really did learn something. ■

Ruby Diamondde is a pseudonym.

GUATEMALA

Fed up with corruption

General elections in Guatemala usually follow a predictable pattern of propaganda, violence and despair. This year, two lacklustre centrist candidates – rightwing populist Manuel Baldizón who promises to reintroduce the death penalty, and former first lady Sandra Torres – are vying for the presidency. But the build-up to September's vote has been anything but routine.

Guatemala is facing a political crisis that has seen tens of thousands march against repeated corruption scandals.

The movement has toppled a plethora of high-ranking government officials. 'The youth are not willing to tolerate the corruption that earlier generations have grown accustomed to,' says Mario Polanco, a Guatemalan human rights activist.

The exposure – by a UN-backed anti-impunity commission – of a multi-million-dollar customs fraud scheme has led to the arrest of 20 state officials and the resignation of the vice-president and six ministers.

Subsequent investigations prompted the jailing of the heads of the central bank and social security institute, cast doubts over individuals within the main opposition party and concluded that the country's elections are flush with illegal money.

Guatemala is no stranger to protest, but the latest scandals have prompted an unprecedented display of unity. 'People who had never protested before came out onto the streets,' says Polanco. 'People aged 50 or older protested against



Crying out for change: a protester at an anti-corruption demonstration in Guatemala City.

Esteban Biba/Alamy

these abuses for the first time, alongside students from all kinds of universities, people of diverse economic and cultural backgrounds and gay people. Even in a country as *machista* as Guatemala, everyone was welcome.'

Emboldened by success, many protesters are calling for the elections to be postponed.

After all, Guatemala has struggled with high-level corruption for years, and few believe that swapping the current president for another will make a difference; what the country needs is a new constitution that mandates electoral reform, to bring in changes such as tighter rules around party financing.

But one thing has already changed, says Polanco: 'The people won't put up with these abuses any longer. They've become empowered and I'm sure they will continue protesting, even against corruption in the next government.' ■

Anna Bevan

EUROPE

Toxic lobby

A recent investigation has exposed how powerful chemical companies obstructed a major European Union (EU) public health initiative. 'A toxic affair', researched by Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) and journalist Stephane Horel, tells the story of how chemical and pesticide lobby groups have successfully blocked EU attempts to better regulate hormone-disrupting chemicals (EDCs).

EDCs are present in everyday products – from plastics and cosmetics to pesticides. They can interact with the hormonal systems of living organisms, and are suspected of having severe environmental and health impacts; human exposure is linked to cancer and infertility, as well as birth defects and learning disorders.

As the fears around EDCs have

grown – a recent study put the medical cost of exposure at \$173 billion a year in the EU alone – the EU has moved to regulate. No fewer than three pieces of EU legislation (2006, 2009 and 2012) demand that if a chemical is identified as an endocrine disruptor, a ban follows.

But lobby groups and corporations such as BASF and Bayer have been in uproar at the potential banning of EDCs – and its impact on their profits. They have delayed the process of agreeing scientific criteria for identifying EDCs for another four years by pushing for a socio-economic 'impact assessment'.

Nina Holland, report co-author, says: 'Hundreds of documents released by the European Commission following freedom of information requests show unambiguously how science is being manipulated to defend vested interests, manufacture doubt and delay a pioneering regulation.'

In a worrying taste of what's to come, lobbyists also used the EU-US trade negotiations (TTIP) as leverage to block any regulation tighter than more lax US rules. ■

Hazel Healy
nnti.toxiclobby

40 years ago



...we featured Fritz Schumacher, author of the classic book *Small Is Beautiful* and founder of the Intermediate Technology Development Group, now known as Practical Action, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

The economic crisis of his day was high inflation, but Schumacher's recipe



ON THE WEB
newint.org

Migrant dreams clash with European reality



Empowering Kurdistan

POLAND

Abortion by drone

There's a new way of accessing abortion services: appointment with a drone. Pro-choice advocacy group Women on Waves is offering Polish women not just guidance but practical assistance to enable safe abortions.

In mid-June, the Dutch NGO – which ordinarily sails ships to countries where abortion is illegal, offering early terminations – organized a delivery of abortion pills with a drone that crossed the border between Germany and Poland, amid a flurry of media coverage and protests from pro-life campaigners.

'While the drones were crossing the German/Polish border, the German police tried to intervene, but the pilots were able to land the drones safely on the Polish side,'

Women on Waves said in a press release. Although the drone was confiscated, the 'non-commercial' pill-drop was not illegal as it took place in the Schengen Area, where countries have eliminated internal borders.

A Dutch doctor had prescribed the pills, which were collected, symbolically, by two women in Poland. Women on Waves hopes that the drone-drop will help push for changes to the law on access to abortion in the EU. Currently, abortion is illegal in Poland – where around 240,000 pregnancies are terminated illegally every year – as well as Malta and Ireland. ■

Cristiana Moisescu

for economic and ecological sustainability was ultimately a striking one: social justice, including a maximum salary.

'There is somewhere a level of income where we can say, "surely, it is enough for all reasonable requirements". No full-time salary will exceed – what shall we say – £12,000 a year... I know there will be objections... that to impose such a ceiling would only make it impossible to "attract" the best people into the most important salaried jobs. But this argument misses the point. Those who cannot accept that enough is enough are *not* the best

Introducing... Selahattin Demirtas

Demirtas rose to prominence in Turkey's June elections. He led the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) into parliament for the first time, with 13 per cent of the vote and 79 MPs.

The telegenic young Kurdish politician is proving a breath of fresh air, combining a gift for oratory with a cool-headed sense of strategy that have allowed him to move beyond his eastern Kurdish base and build support amongst secular Turks in the west of the country. His staunch commitment to human rights is proving popular with women and LGBT people.

Demirtas began his career as a lawyer, defending those who fell foul of the Turkish political establishment, particularly the increasingly autocratic Islamist president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It was Erdogan's link to corrupt practices and plans to centralize power under a boss-like executive presidency that helped fuel support for Demirtas, and

the HDP's rise has put a stop to some of Erdogan's more outlandish ambitions.

Despite his roots in the Kurdish movement, the HDP's vocal support for the Syriza government in Greece – a traditional foe of Turkey – helps situate Demirtas as part of a more generalized revolt that is spreading, if unevenly, from Lisbon to Kurdistan.

The victims of debt-fuelled growth and its environmental and human costs are forging links that promise a brighter future for the Mediterranean rim and beyond. However, Turkey has a nasty history of political assassination and Demirtas could become a prime candidate for those inspired by conservative nationalism or religious zeal. ■

Richard Swift



epa/european pressphoto agency b.v./Alamy

NETHERLANDS

Basic income trialled

What would you do if you could earn a modest regular income without having to go to work? Sit passively at home, or use your new freedom constructively? Citizens in Utrecht will find out when their city tests the feasibility of a universal basic income this autumn.

The year-long experiment – by city officials and Utrecht University – will

see 250 participants receive \$980-\$1,415 a month for basic living costs such as healthcare and groceries.

Critics claim it will discourage people from working, but organizer Nienke Horst thinks 'people will still make every effort to find a job, or participate in a different way' such as through volunteering or childcare.

The trial is not universal, which is how basic income would work if scaled up. Instead, it will target benefit claimants. This will include a control group who, under current benefit rules, are used to payments being cut if a job is not found.

'Basic income will free people in ways they've never experienced,' says activist Scott Santens. 'No more stress over what happens if benefits are lost, no more continually proving one's worthiness to not go hungry.'

Other pilots have occurred in Canada, India and Brazil, all reporting positive results. More than 30 other Dutch municipalities, the region of Aquitaine in France and the new government of Finland are considering similar trials. ■

Tom Lawson

people; they are dangerous people who make all our problems insoluble and we cannot have them as top civil servants, industrialists, judges, generals, etc.'

The sum of £12,000 in 1975 was the equivalent of around £112,000 (\$175,000) in 2015. Ironically, he was actually writing at the high-water mark of social equality in British history – with every passing decade things have become more unequal in many (though not all) Western countries, including Britain and the US. Who will make the case for a maximum wage now? ■

Chris Brazier

India: the 'world's pharmacy' is failing its own



Life after the guerrillas in Colombia

NEW INTERNATIONALIST

Fracking on trial



BANGLADESH

Kalpana's Warriors rise

Kalpana Chakma was a fiery, courageous young indigenous woman of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. Twenty years ago, she dared to demand her rights. She had the audacity to speak out against military occupation and harassment by her own country's army. She had the temerity to insist that, as a citizen of a free nation, she too needed to be treated as an equal.

Then, in the early hours of 12 June 1996, she was abducted at gunpoint by the Bangladesh military. She never returned. The principal accused, Lieutenant Ferdous, has never been questioned by the police. He too has 'disappeared'.

Almost two decades later, the photographer and activist Shahidul Alam has created 'Kalpana's Warriors', an extraordinary exhibition of images of Kalpana and those connected to her, etched with lasers onto the straw mats on which she slept. Using extensive research, and photographic and forensic techniques, the images visualize scenes and faces made invisible through the passage of time, and break a silence that successive Bangladeshi governments have carefully nurtured.



A reminder that a nation that fought oppression cannot rule by oppression: the Kalpana's Warriors exhibition.

Shahidul Alam

'We respond to things we can relate to, when the victim is no longer the other,' explains Shahidul. 'I was targeting the heart before targeting the brain. A new visual language was needed, but the artwork itself was not enough. Linking the process with the politics enabled an engagement with the audience and I hoped they would take emotions with them that would transform them into fellow warriors.'

'I believe it worked. The atmosphere at the opening was incredible. People were in tears, but also angered into action. We now need to channel this anger.' ■

Jess Worth

nin.tl/kalpanaswarriors

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

Water revolution

Around the world, water privatization is failing, and communities are successfully taking water and sanitation services back under public control.

Across 37 countries, 100 million *more* people now get their water from a public provider than they did 15 years ago. In most cases, this is because a private water company's contract has been terminated early, as a result of soaring bills, under-investment and poor service quality,

and on the back of strong local campaigns from residents, water workers and civil-society groups.

There are so many examples – 237 and counting, listed in a new report by Public Services International Research Unit and Transnational Institute – that there can be no doubt this is a trend. The remunicipalization of Paris's water supply in 2010 was an important catalyst for other cities taking action around the world. Many of these had once been flagship privatization projects, including Buenos Aires (Argentina), La Paz (Bolivia), Johannesburg (South Africa), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia).

Jakarta is the latest to follow suit. After two decades of struggle, the Central Jakarta District Court annulled the privatized water contracts serving Indonesia's capital when a lawsuit was brought by citizens. Authorities had awarded contracts to UK-based Thames Water and France's Suez in 1997. The firms had since failed to supply water to half the population and piped poor-quality water to the other half. Close to 45 per cent of water was lost through leaky pipes. Despite all these

Scratchy Lines

by Simon Kneebone



Anita Martini

Reasons to be cheerful

MALAWI

The \$43m tax dodge

When Australian transnational Paladin started operations in Malawi six years ago, it sounded like it would be good news for the public purse of the world's poorest country. Sadly, this has not been the case.

Since then, the company – which mines uranium for sale primarily in North America – has managed to cut an eye-watering \$43 million off its tax bill, international charity ActionAid has revealed.

Worse still, Paladin did nothing illegal. The company used complex corporate structures to exploit loopholes in international tax rules, and negotiated a huge tax break from the Malawian government.

Malawi – ranked the poorest nation by the World Bank last February – sorely needs Paladin's tax revenue to pay for public services. On average, there are only three nurses for every 10,000 people and life expectancy is just 55. Like many other low-income countries, Malawi relies on taxation

from transnational companies for a big chunk of its expected tax revenue.

Paladin described ActionAid's findings as 'fundamentally unsound', in Malawi's *Nyasa Times*. It argued that without a 'reduced royalty rate' the project would not have gone ahead at all, and talked up the benefits to Malawi, such as increased foreign exchange reserves and contracts for local suppliers.

The charity argues that developing countries will continue to lose billions of dollars a year to tax-dodging by transnational companies unless they are given an equal seat at the negotiating table. 'It's no surprise that Malawi lost out to the international tax system,' explains Chisomo Manthalu from ActionAid Malawi. 'Our government never got a say in shaping global tax rules. Instead, the system has been created by the richest and most powerful countries, and as a result it represents their interests and the interests of the transnational companies that are headquartered there.' ■

Natasha Adams
actionaid.org/tax

problems, Jakarta's residents paid the highest water bills in Southeast Asia.

Dar es Salaam's water contract with UK-based

Biwater was terminated in 2005 because of poor performance. Biwater used legal commitments in

the bilateral investment treaty between Tanzania and Britain to sue the Tanzanian government for ending the contract early and taking over a private asset. Biwater lost both cases but has yet to pay the \$4.7 million it owes in costs.

Cities are using their new powers to give citizens greater control over tariffs and investment. They are also sharing their expertise – the Mozambique government has recently teamed up with a Dutch public water company.

Despite three decades of relentless promotion of privatization, in water as well as many other fields, there are now 237 examples of why publicly provided water services work better for the people. ■

Polly Jones
Global Justice Now

A bee-line highway

Oslo is ahead of the curve once again with an ingenious solution for helping out endangered bee species. The Norwegian capital has created a bee highway to provide safe passage for the struggling insects, with rooftop gardens and even cemeteries replanted with flowers to attract the pollinators. The 'highway' is made up of individual projects, mapped out on the website polli.no. With one in ten of Europe's bees dying out, let's hope this works.

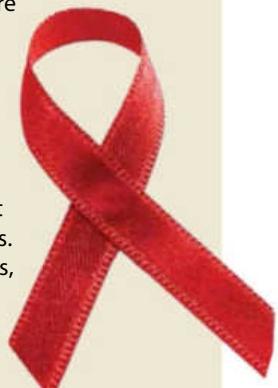


Sunlight satellite

A new type of space travel is being pioneered, by a satellite that sails on sunlight. The first LightSail satellite was successfully deployed in June, using solar power – not traditional rockets or thrusters – to propel it around the Earth. The prototype craft, built by the US Planetary Society and funded by public donations, could spell a new hope for zero-carbon space exploration. Another mission is due to be launched next year, which will test the full propulsion system.

Cuban health win

The World Health Organization has hailed it as 'one of the greatest public health achievements possible'. Cuba has become the first country to officially eliminate mother-to-baby HIV and syphilis transmission. This breakthrough is an important step in proving that the HIV virus can be eradicated. Worldwide, there are 16 million women living with HIV, and 1.4 million become pregnant annually. The risk of passing on the virus is 45 per cent without anti-retroviral drugs. With the right drugs, Cuba has shown that it can come down to zero.



A resilient revolution

In the early days of the Syrian uprising, civil society blossomed for the first time in generations. Despite the destruction, it is still alive, says DANIEL ADAMSON.





Syrian artist Tammam Azzam celebrates the power of creative protest in this digital artwork titled 'Demonstration'.

Tammam Azzam

In December 2011, a group of Syrian activists released 2,000 ping-pong balls onto a steeply sloping street in Damascus. On each one, they had written a single word: freedom.

The activists belonged to Freedom Syria Days – a collective of revolutionary groups dismayed by Syria's slide into war and desperate to hold on to the nonviolent, subversive spirit that had marked the first months of the uprising. Insisting that Assad's regime could be crippled by civil disobedience, they instigated a general strike, closing shops and disrupting transport networks. They covered credit cards with glue and stuck them into ATMs. They poured red dye into the fountains of Damascus.

There was nothing frivolous about this. The activists knew that Syrians had been tortured and killed for acts of creative resistance. What they could not have known, though, was that while they were releasing ping-pong balls, Assad was releasing known Islamist militants from Syria's jails.

The regime tried to disguise this within a general amnesty, to pass it off as part of a package of 'reforms'. But Assad's real intention, many analysts believe, was to transform a civil uprising into an Islamist insurgency that would both legitimize the crushing of the revolution and discourage the US from any thoughts of regime change.¹

It took a long time for Syria's revolutionaries to take up arms, and longer still before they were eclipsed by the ferocity of the Islamist militias. In the end, though, Assad's selective release of prisoners, the army's murderous assault on peaceful demonstrators and the meddling of foreign powers (see 'Proxy War' on page 17) ensured that Syria was engulfed in a full-scale civil war.

By 2013, the Sunni jihadist movement that had plagued Iraq for years had bled across the border and morphed into ISIS, a group even more nihilistic and vindictive than its progenitors. As Assad registered the growing alarm of the West, he must have been thrilled. He had always said Syria was dealing with terrorists, that his regime was the only bulwark against fanaticism. By 2014, with 200,000 people dead and the country in ruins, it was starting to sound plausible.

Fear crumbles

The regime's willingness to set Syria ablaze was a desperate strategy, but not an irrational one. However frightening the prospect of a jihadist insurgency, Assad seemed even more terrified by the nonviolent uprising from which the ping-pong activists had emerged.

What really worried him was the erosion of the fear which, for 40 years, had sealed Syria's lips, suffocated its talent, and stifled its imagination. Fear was the mortar that held

Assad's Syria together. Now, under the pressure of the uprising, it was crumbling.

As it disintegrated, Syrians found a voice that had been silenced for decades. They sang songs that mocked Assad and laughed at the fawning servility of those who surrounded him. (See pages 22-25 for a gallery of revolutionary art.) They tore down portraits that had intimidated people for years, and raised banners that gave voice to the hopes of ordinary Syrian men and women. Most important of all, they began to articulate a Syrian national identity in terms of *opposition* to the state. The regime had spent years weaving the cult of the Assads into the fabric of Syrian patriotism. Suddenly, this whole scheme was unravelling. Without firing a shot, the demonstrators had undermined the psychological basis of Assad's rule. It was too late now to placate them with reforms or higher wages. 'We don't want your bread,' the crowds chanted, 'we want dignity.'

Fledgling civil society

Wherever the regime was pushed from power, this outpouring of energy was converted into something that had never been allowed to flourish in Syria: a civil society. The people who had marched for freedom now ran hospitals and schools, documented violations and reported news. Some joined local councils. Others set up projects to train journalists or treat traumatized children. These initiatives were often shut down by fighting, or hampered by lack of funds or experience. But for all its flaws, the revolutionary movement was lit up by the courage of the Syrian people.

Assad's assault on this fledgling civil society is perhaps the saddest chapter in the tragedy of Syria's war. In rebel-held towns, schools and hospitals were hit by a rain of barrel bombs that killed thousands of civilians and displaced millions more. (See 'Rushing towards death', pages 26-27 for the civilian humanitarian response). In areas under regime control, security services detained anyone who showed too much independence of mind – web developers like Basel Khartabil, who campaigned for the freedom of information online; lawyers like Khalil Ma'touk, who defended Syria's prisoners of conscience; humanitarians like Raed al-Tawil, who volunteered with the Red Crescent in Damascus. All three men vanished into the regime's jails in 2012. None has been heard from since.

No-one knows how many languish alongside them – perhaps as many as 150,000 – and few can imagine the horrors these people endure. It was not until 2014, when a forensic photographer defected from the Syrian military with 55,000 images on flash drives, that the world got its first glimpse into what goes on in these jails. The photos showed



Kafraanbel

some 11,000 corpses bearing the marks of starvation, pipe beatings, cigarette and acid burns, electrocution, fingernail extractions, strangulation and stabbings.

The arrest of so many lawyers, journalists and doctors has deprived the country of some of those who had the most to contribute to the creation of a more humane and open society. Many others have fled Syria. The optimism of 2011 and 2012 has been crushed by the sheer scale of destruction.

Heroes abandoned

Despite all this, though, Syria's nonviolent resistance is still alive. Much of its energy has, by necessity, been directed towards emergency relief – pulling the wounded from the rubble, keeping clinics supplied, distributing food in areas under siege. But even under these conditions, there are activists working on the longer-term challenges of state building – creating a free press, educating women, advancing the notion of transitional justice. 'On the news you see only blood and destruction,' one woman told Human Rights Watch in 2014. 'You don't see that behind it, there are civilian groups doing things peacefully. We are still here.'

In its neglect of these activists and its lurid fascination with ISIS, the media has played along with Assad's narrative of a war against terrorists – a narrative that ignores Syria's democrats and depicts Syrians as passive victims in a bloody game between Islamists and autocrats. After the fight that these people have put up and the sacrifices they have made, it is hard to imagine how dispiriting this must feel.

No-one, at this stage, is naïve enough to think that a stable and prosperous democracy is about to bloom from the rubble. Half the country's people are displaced, thousands have suffered or committed acts from which they are unlikely to ever fully recover, and a whole generation is growing up traumatized and

illiterate in the refugee camps that cluster along Syria's borders.

Worse than naïve, though, would be to abandon the brave men and women who are still fighting to keep alive the hopes that were expressed so forcefully at the start of the uprising. To ignore these people, as the international community continues to do, is to deprive them of solidarity, to limit their access to funds and training, and to make sure that their voices are sidelined at the international negotiations on Syria's future.

In these pages we have space for only a few examples. Many heroic people cannot be featured here, and thousands more remain unknown. But despite these omissions, this edition of **New Internationalist** attempts to recognize and amplify the voices of some of the best and bravest revolutionaries in Syria. Many of them, when asked what the international community can do to help, converge on a single conclusion: Syrians need an internationally enforced No-Fly Zone to protect them from Assad's barrel bombs.

Beyond this specific appeal, these voices bear witness to the humanity, creativity, and imagination that has marked the Syrian revolution from its first day. 'The Syrian people,' wrote journalist Mazen Darwish in a letter smuggled out of a Damascus jail cell, 'are children of life, capable of constructing a state built on dignity, freedom and justice.' That is a judgment illustrated by every one of the contributors and interviewees here. Together, they offer a rebuke to any suggestion that the Syrian people might be receptive to the death cult of ISIS, or are better off under a dictator. ■

In the early days of revolution, a group of friends from a village called Kafranbel in Syria's northwest began to paint appeals for freedom and solidarity onto cotton banners and to draw satirical cartoons about the lack of international support. Written in English as well as Arabic, Kafranbel's weekly messages had a mix of idealism and snark that made them perfect in a social media age. They have now been seen by millions of people all over the world.

'On the news you see only blood and destruction but there are civilian groups doing things peacefully. We are still here.'

1 For details on the Syrian regime's selective amnesty in which hundreds of nonviolent activists remained in jail while an unknown number of Salafist jihadists walked free, see Jean-Pierre Filipi's *From Deep State to Islamic State – the Arab Counter-Revolution and its Jihadi Legacy* (pp 200–205) and *ISIS – Inside the Army of Terror* by Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan (pp 144–152).

Is anybody out there?

While the media obsesses over ISIS' gory snuff videos, nonviolent Syrians are working to build a humane, plural society. It's time the world paid attention, says HANIA MOURTADA.

Imagine a town or region that has been wrested from government control and is now in the hands of the rebels. One image that comes to mind is the bleak, sterile, murderous society imposed by ISIS in parts of Syria's northeast. But across whole regions of the country, ordinary Syrians are struggling to build a culture that is humane and vibrant, democratic, plural and just.

Even now, after four and a half years of war, groups are working day in day out to lay the foundations for a better Syria. Subversive graffiti, radio stations, schools, field hospitals, groups offering psycho-social support to children, centres for the education of women – all these initiatives have emerged from Syria's new civil society. Remarkably, this has happened despite the barrel bombs that the regime continues to drop on rebel-held areas.

In eastern Ghouta, a rebel stronghold in Damascus, the Unified Revolutionary Medical Bureau provides medical care to a starving, besieged community. It has also documented and reported chemical attacks on civilians. Despite a lack of medicine and equipment, these men and women refuse to give up. Their presence reassures local people who have nowhere else to turn.

In Maaret al-Noaman, a strategic city in the northeast, a woman called Muznah runs an educational centre that offers women literacy courses as well as vocational training in nursing and hairdressing. Some attendees are single mothers who, thanks to these courses, are able to find work and support their children. 'Older women thought that life had already passed them by,' says Muznah, 'yet here they are reinventing themselves, making the best of a very dire situation.'

In the Damascus suburb of Daraya, a group of young female journalists have started an outspoken independent weekly newspaper, *Enab Baladi*, the first of its kind in liberated areas.

In December 2014, we established Planet Syria: a network of over 100 civil-society groups working across the country, in order to make these, and other voices, heard. By knitting groups together, highlighting their stories of creativity and resistance, we aim to strengthen the movement and lift its profile.

These Syrians are begging to be supported in their journey from passive subjects of an authoritarian state to active citizens in charge of their own destiny. We're asking policymakers to engage with the people who have clung to the righteousness of their struggle for social justice even as the uprising has turned into a complicated war. Patient humanitarian work and nonviolent activism cannot compete for media attention against the gory snuff videos put out by ISIS; but that doesn't mean they should be ignored.

It's true that many of these groups have seen their work disrupted by radical militias who have risen from Syria's chaos. But the main impediment to civil society are the barrel bombs, which continue to bury Syrians under the rubble of destroyed neighbourhoods. If liberated rebel-held areas were protected from Assad's daily onslaught through a No-Fly Zone, for example, the nonviolent civil activism and self-governance that has been established in Syria would start to flourish, refugees would return, and an alternative order to that of Assad would begin to emerge. Unless the bombs are stopped, Planet Syria won't have faith in the demands of the international community, or any internationally backed peace process.

At the start of this uprising there was a moment of great promise. Many ordinary Syrians have since tried to build on that. Anyone who claims to care about Syria has a duty to support them. ■

planetsyria.org

Tamman Azzam



Syrian conflict

The facts

Death toll

240,000 Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) estimate, July 2015

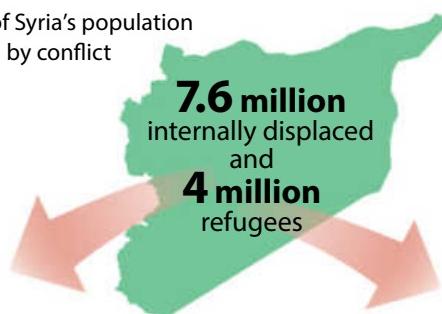
Political prisoners



Over 11,000 Syrians killed in regime prisons by torture, starvation and execution²

Humanitarian crisis³

50% of Syria's population displaced by conflict



12.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria³



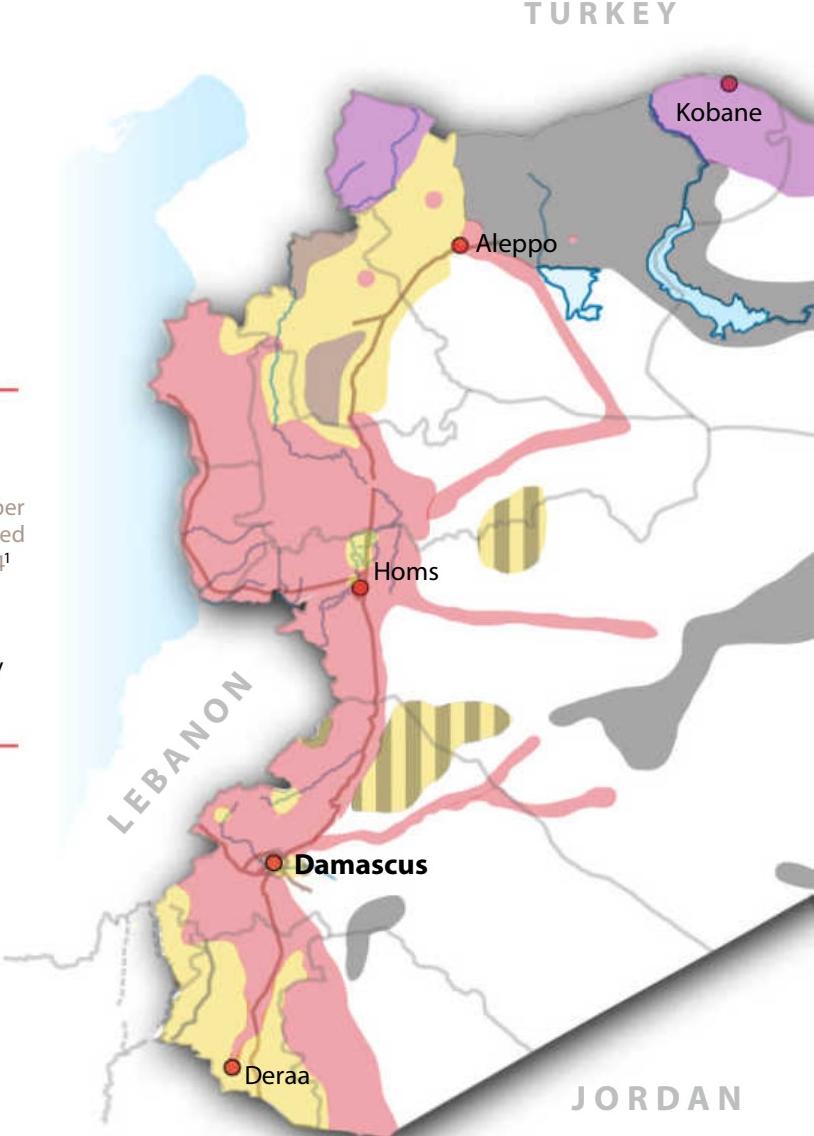
4% the share of Syrian refugees hosted by EU countries⁴



640,200 people are trapped in besieged locations within Syria⁵



2,157 Syrians have drowned trying to reach Europe. 75% were women and children⁶



TIMELINE

2011

March
Inspired by the Arab Spring, schoolboys in Deraa graffiti anti-regime slogans. Their subsequent arrest and torture sparks peaceful protests calling for reform.

President Bashar al-Assad announces conciliatory measures while security forces repeatedly open fire on unarmed protesters.

April
Civilian death toll reaches 200. The people call for an end to the Assad regime.

May
The regime tortures and kills a 13-year-old boy, Hamza Ali al-Khateeb. Protests spread throughout the country.

Army tanks roll into Deraa, Banyas, Homs and suburbs of Damascus.

US and European Union impose sanctions.

July
First signs of an armed opposition emerge. The Free Syria Army is founded by a small group of army defectors. Peaceful mass demonstrations continue. Assad begins to release Islamist jihadi leaders from regime jails.

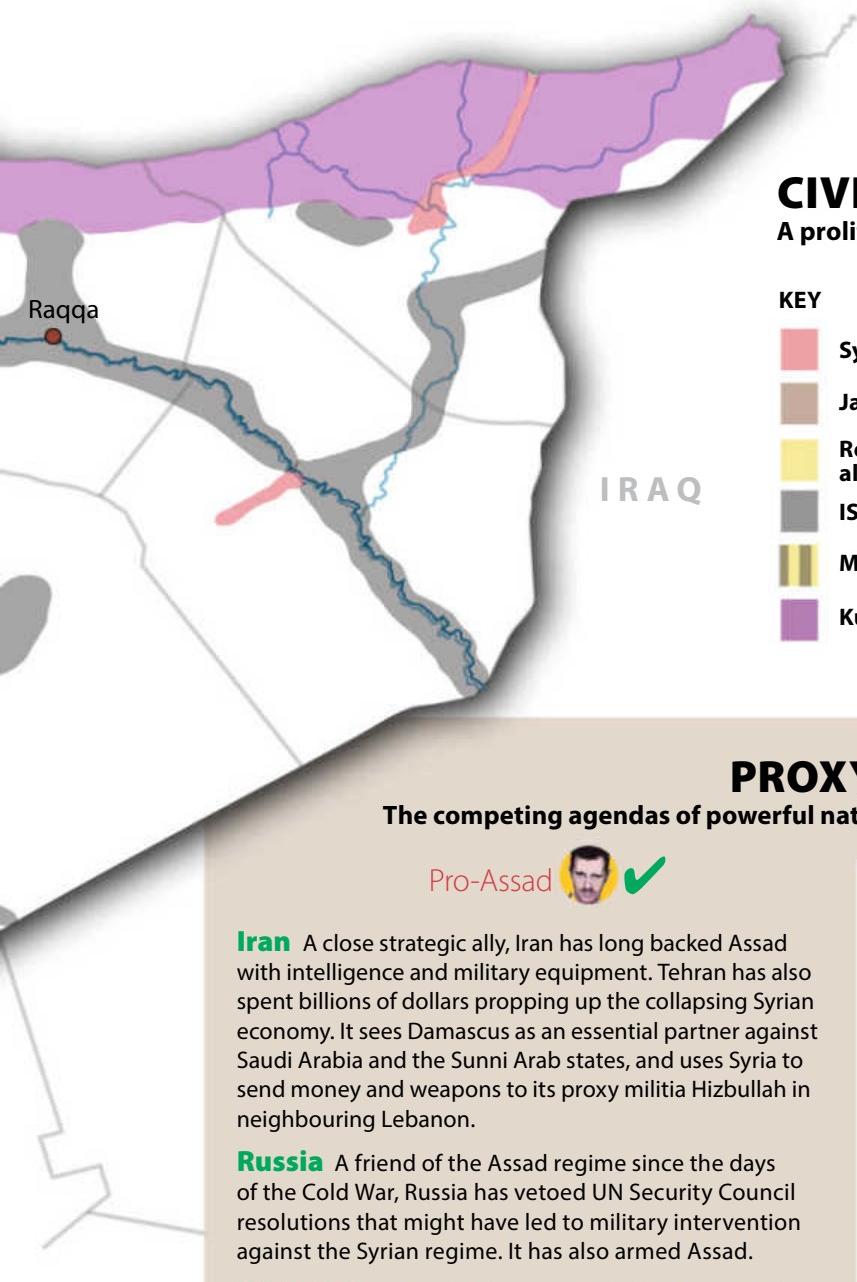
January
Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda affiliate, announces its formation in Syria

February
Government steps up the bombardment of Homs and other cities. The UN says more than 7,500 Syrians have now been killed.

Leading pro-democracy activist Mazen Darwish and associates are arrested in Damascus.

May
Regime massacres more than 100 civilians, including 49 children, in Houla, near Homs. Britain, Canada, Australia and other countries expel Syrian diplomats.

July
The Red Cross declares conflict a full-scale 'civil war'. In Jordan the Za'atari refugee camp opens. It will soon become home to over 120,000 refugees.



CIVIL WAR⁷

A proliferation of armed actors has partitioned the country

KEY

- Syrian armed forces and allied militias
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN) – an Islamist group affiliated to al-Qaeda
- Rebel forces – an affiliation of the Free Syrian Army and allied groups
- ISIS – Islamist group attacking both regime and rebel forces
- Mixed – areas where rebels, ISIS and JaN all have influence
- Kurdish fighters

PROXY WAR

The competing agendas of powerful nations have deepened the conflict in Syria



Iran A close strategic ally, Iran has long backed Assad with intelligence and military equipment. Tehran has also spent billions of dollars propping up the collapsing Syrian economy. It sees Damascus as an essential partner against Saudi Arabia and the Sunni Arab states, and uses Syria to send money and weapons to its proxy militia Hizballah in neighbouring Lebanon.

Russia A friend of the Assad regime since the days of the Cold War, Russia has vetoed UN Security Council resolutions that might have led to military intervention against the Syrian regime. It has also armed Assad.

Hizballah Like its backer, Iran, Hizballah supported Assad from the start. The Shi'a militia has stepped up support since 2013, when its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, publicly acknowledged that his men were fighting in Syria.



Turkey An early opponent of the regime, Turkey hosted, trained and equipped the Free Syrian Army in the summer of 2011 and, more recently, joined with Saudi Arabia in increasing military aid to the rebels.

Saudi Arabia Saudi Arabia is supporting the rebels, including some Islamist groups. Its hostility to Assad is tied to a long-standing opposition to Iranian influence in the region. In March 2015, King Salman hosted a meeting at which leaders from Turkey, Qatar and other Gulf nations agreed to work together to funnel weapons and cash to rebels.

US Initially pledged support for the rebels, and in 2013 came close to military intervention against Assad. Since the rise of ISIS, however, the US has focused its attention on attacking the jihadis.

1 New York Times [nin.tl/record-detainee-deaths-oct-2014](#) **2** New York Times [nin.tl/torture-photo-evidence](#) **3** UNOCHA [nin.tl/syria-refugee-crisis](#) **4** UNHCR [nin.tl/europe-syria-refugee](#) **5** syriaundersiege.org [nin.tl/slow-death-report](#) **6** Syrian Network for Human Rights [nin.tl/from-death-to-death-report](#) **7** Institute for the Study of War, 9 July 2015. [nin.tl/ISW-syria-project](#)

2013

March

Syrian refugees number 1 million.

April

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announces the formation of ISIS. Conflict breaks out between the two main Islamist jihadi groups, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra.

July

The regime begins the siege of Yarmouk, a Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus. Hundreds of

2014

January–February

UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva break down. UN resolution demands an end to the indiscriminate bombing of civilians. Regime intensifies barrel-bombing campaign over coming months. Human Rights Watch concludes that the Assad regime has dropped bombs containing chlorine gas on civilian areas.

2015

May

Government retakes the historic centre of Homs from the rebels after three-year siege.

August

ISIS releases first murder video showing the beheading of captured US journalist James Foley.

September

US and five Arab countries launch air strikes against ISIS around Aleppo and Raqqa.

January

With help of US-led airstrikes, Kurdish forces retake Kobane.

June

UN reports that indiscriminate attacks on civilian-inhabited areas are committed across Syria 'by most, if not all, of the warring parties'.



We must stand in solidarity with Syria's human rights defenders, says SALMAN RUSHDIE.

Over a period of 40 years, the Syrian regime created a network of police informers and intelligence agencies that suffocated the country with fear. Many of those brave enough to speak up were caught in this web of state surveillance and silenced by Assad's infrastructure of detention and torture.

That is the context in which a young lawyer and journalist called Mazen Darwish set up the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression in 2004. He did this not from the safety of exile or the anonymity of the internet, but under his own name from an office in the heart of Damascus.

Darwish courageously fought for free expression and human rights in one of the most dangerous places in the world. On 16 February 2012, he was arrested by officers from the notorious Air Force Intelligence unit together with his colleagues Hussein Gharir and Hani al-Zitani. Gharir and al-Zitani were released in July 2015. Darwish remains in jail.

In 2014, I shared the PEN Pinter award with Mazen in an effort to shine a light on his continued detention. At a time when people across Syria and the region are caught between state violence and Islamist savagery, it is crucial that we know about and stand in solidarity with Syrian democrats and human rights defenders. There is none braver than Mazen Darwish.

'I love you, an

The journalist YARA BADR, Mazen Darwish's wife, describes how he refused to allow the security state to crush Syria's civic, intellectual and cultural life.

I sometimes think I know Mazen Darwish better as a rebel, as a dissident, and as an influential figure in Syrian society than I do as a husband, since the Syrian authorities did not give us the chance to spend more than five months together under the same roof. We were married on 16 September 2011, six months after the start of the Syrian revolution, and arrested in Damascus on 16 February 2012. I was released after three months. Mazen remains in prison to this day.

It was a risk he knew he was taking when, in 2004, he returned to Syria from France, where he had been living in exile for a number of years. My first fight with Mazen was about the West and Syria. I was speaking about the differences in lifestyle between Syria and Europe, but Mazen raised his voice and said: 'You don't know what it's like to live as a second-class citizen.' In truth, I did not even know the meaning of the word 'citizenship'. Mazen knew. That is why he gave up all that France has to offer and, of his own free will, came home to fight for citizenship in his own country.

The first issue he took on was freedom of expression. Instead of speaking truth to power, Syria's media did nothing but dictate the lessons of the regime to the people. In response, Mazen founded the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCMFE), publishing journalism that challenged the lies churned out by the Syrian state.

He was not alone in these activities. The human rights lawyer Razan Zaitounah (missing since February 2014 when she was abducted by an armed group), Kurdish activist Mashaal Tammo (assassinated by the regime in the early days of the uprising in 2011), political activist Yahya Shurbaji and the writer Hussein Isso (both arrested in September 2011, whereabouts unknown)... there are too many brave Syrian activists and dissidents to name here. The centre's lawyer, Khalil Ma'touk, remains in detention. But even in this company,

'd you love 20 million people'

Mazen stood out for the clarity with which he criticized aspects of Syrian society that many of us simply took for granted.

In the period between 2004 and 2010, Mazen's articles offered an analysis of Syria that diverged sharply from the line peddled by the ruling élite. His analysis was revolutionary in that it challenged the state's monopoly over knowledge. This was a regime that used its ownership of the media to control information, to limit culture, and to instill patterns of thought in the Syrian people. Mazen broke that monopoly. He took ownership of information and made it available. He wrote about human rights in the Arab world, about state control of the internet, about the link between democracy

Mazen smiled sadly, and in a voice so quiet I could barely hear it, said: 'In freedom, you are more beautiful'

and free expression. He even told young people about scholarship opportunities.

Mazen's work was revolutionary in a deep way. He directed his criticisms not against particular individuals who happened to hold power, but against the structures and mechanisms of power itself. By exposing the state's attempt to control knowledge, and by supplying an alternative way of seeing reality, Mazen helped break Syria's cycle of despair.

Syrian society had been sunk in this cycle for decades. The security state, developing since the 1960s, was the only institution that thrived under the Assad regime. Through its uneducated and unenlightened members, it monitored everything: thought, publications and education – even conversations among members of the public. This constant surveillance was justified by the 'emergency laws', in place since 1963.

Mazen refused to allow the security state to crush our civic, intellectual and cultural life. He tried to promote the idea of Syria as a country, distinct from the regime, and to encourage a genuine sense of citizenship. That's why he was arrested, and that's why the Syrian authorities, despite all the international resolutions that have been adopted, refuse to release him.

This is the Mazen I know: an oval face and a shy smile, and the quiet self-assurance of a man

who has chosen to fight for a more beautiful homeland. For Mazen, it was a homeland that included everybody. I remember how he would celebrate Nowruz, the Kurdish New Year, with Kurdish Syrians in the north of the country, even at a time when the regime was cracking down on these festivities. I remember, too, how much Mazen loved Damascus, how he had memorized every detail of the city as if each were a corner of his own house.

I always knew I'd have to share Mazen with the rest of Syria. Even on our wedding day he showed up late because he had become involved in a protest in one of the Damascus suburbs. I used to say to him 'I love you, and you love 20 million people.'

He never doubted the Syrians. In 2009, at our first dinner alone together, I was complaining about the people who were frightened even to talk to us, knowing that I came from a dissident family and that Mazen was constantly being followed. But Mazen saw that the Syrians had had enough. 'Those people,' he said, 'are going to make a revolution.'

Most vivid of all is the memory of a morning in the spring of 2010. It was a sunny day, beautiful as a dream, and we were laughing. I don't know what we were talking about, but I, half-joking and with all the arrogance of young lovers, asked Mazen: 'What is more beautiful, me or freedom?'

Mazen smiled sadly, and in a voice so quiet I could barely hear it, said: 'In freedom, you are more beautiful.' The sadness and conviction in his voice was enough to awaken all my fears. I respected him for his honesty and integrity. And I realized that we would walk together on this path to the end, wherever it may lead us. ■



**Yara and Mazen
in Damascus,
in happier times.**

Bravery's edge Thousands of unknown activists

Souad Nofal

The teacher who stood up to ISIS

When the Assad regime was forced from the northeastern city of Raqqa in the summer of 2013, Souad Nofal was elated. A schoolteacher in the town, she belonged to a revolutionary group that used non-violent tactics to instigate civil unrest. ‘We rushed into the street, crying and singing,’ she remembers. ‘I wanted to live as they do in the countries we see on the TV – for a person to say whatever they want and not be afraid.’

The elation was short lived. The Islamist group that had just started to call itself ISIS quickly became a major presence in the city. Many of Raqqa’s revolutionaries left, and those that remained were intimidated into silence. But as Nofal saw the revolution’s promise betrayed,



‘ISIS put a gun to my head, but I laughed at them’

she decided to confront the Islamists.

Every day for more than two months she stood alone outside ISIS headquarters in Raqqa carrying a hand-drawn placard. Each criticized a different aspect of the group’s ideology or behaviour. ‘Don’t talk so much about your religion,’ said one, ‘show us your religion through decency, compassion, and good deeds.’ Another read ‘Our revolution was started by honourable people, and is being stolen by thieves.’ The simplest message of all was ‘ISIS = Assad’.

It was an astonishingly brave thing to do. ‘They put AK47s to my head, but I laughed at them’, says Nofal. ‘I could feel their fear, fear of the words I wrote on my posters.’

In early October 2013, Nofal used her placard to condemn the burning of two Christian churches in Raqqa. ISIS militants ripped the paper to shreds and fired shots at Nofal and her sister as they ran down the street. Days later, Nofal escaped across the border into Turkey. She is now a refugee in Holland. ■

Abu Mohammed*

Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently

In 2013, a young media activist saw a car drive through the streets of Raqqa with the words ‘Islamic State of Iraq’ painted on the side. Abu Mohammed knew nothing about the men inside, but he remembers the fear. ‘I said to myself, “May God protect us from those people”.

By 2014 those fighters, now calling themselves ISIS, had taken over Raqqa, and Abu Mohammed began to see public executions in the streets. In April that year, together with five other friends, he started a website to document and expose the brutality of the jihadists now lording it over his hometown. About a month after the launch, ISIS captured and killed one of the project’s six founders.

The site – Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently – now has 25 contributors and has become a key source of information for journalists and



‘I grew a beard, and I try to wear their style of clothes’

analysts all over the world. The people who run it are all between 20 and 30 years old. Four are women. Most live with their parents, who know nothing about their children’s activism. They meet only online and hide their identities even from each other, to prevent the possibility that any one of them, if tortured by ISIS, might reveal the names of the others.

Outwardly, Abu Mohammed has adopted the attitudes of Raqqa’s new rulers. ‘I did change my look – I grew a beard, and I try to wear their style of clothes.’ But from the anonymity of his laptop, he continues to fight for the ideas that inspired him to revolt against Assad in 2011: ‘I wanted to see Syria as a civil state... as a democratic country where people live under the rule of law.’

As well as being a rejection of all that ISIS stands for, the website stands as a reminder of those values. ‘There is a civil side to this country,’ he says. ‘Syrians demonstrated for freedom and dignity, not for ISIS or the regime.’ ■

* Not the activist’s real name.

have risked their lives to defy extremism and violence.

Ayham Ahmed

The piano man of Yarmouk

In April 2015, Islamist militants poured petrol onto a brightly painted piano and set the instrument on fire.

The piano belonged to Ayham Ahmed, a 28-year-old musician born in Yarmouk, a densely populated neighbourhood of southern Damascus that had grown out of a Palestinian refugee camp set up in the 1950s.

For the past three years, Yarmouk has been under siege. Between August and December 2013, nothing got in or out. On top of those killed by shells or snipers, more than 100 people died of starvation and disease.

At the beginning of the siege, Ahmed decided 'to play my piano in the streets and alleyways of the camp that I love.' He built a wheeled platform to help move the battered instrument around Yarmouk, playing songs for children traumatized by fighting.



'I am going to sing for love and peace, even if no one helps us'

'I sing the different colours of suffering of the people in the camp,' he says. 'And I teach music to kids, because it is the only thing that can change their state of mind.'

Ayham began playing at the age of six, and went on to study with a series of distinguished Syrian and Russian teachers at the Arab Institute of Music in Damascus. His first love is Russian composer Rachmaninov.

Since the Islamists took control of the camp in April, Ayham's efforts to alleviate the agony of Yarmouk have placed his own life in danger. 'Music is among the things that are prohibited by the hardline Islamists,' he says. Ayham now has two children of his own, Ahmed and Kenan, both born under siege. He is desperate to bring them to safety.

'I am sad that my piano has been burned,' he says, 'but I am more sad about the lack of help from a limp world that is looking at our suffering without lifting a finger to ease the pain... Still, I am going to sing for love and peace, even if no one helps us.'

Dr Majed Abu Ali

The doctor who treated victims of a chemical attack

Majed's first child was born in the spring of 2013, towards the end of what he now calls the golden days of the revolution. The regime had been pushed from Eastern Ghouta in November the previous year, and people were convinced that Syria was close to freedom. 'We were excited, and wanted to build our country,' he remembers. 'We began to form our own local councils, our own hospitals, our own bakeries and schools.'

The regime, though, had other plans. The region's water and electricity were cut off. No food was allowed in. Day after day, the Syrian army launched air strikes against a civilian population. 'The regime,' says Majed, 'was targeting the hospitals.'

Before the war he had been



'We're used to dealing with blood, but there was no blood. They were just sleeping'

a dentist. Now, he was working as a volunteer medic and using his contacts to keep Ghouta's field hospitals supplied. The medical teams were well organized – but nothing could have prepared them for what was coming.

On 21 August 2013, a densely populated neighbourhood was hit with rockets containing the chemical agent sarin. Majed was at his hospital when the bodies started to come in. 'Kids and women arrived in their sleeping clothes. We could not believe they were dead. We're used to dealing with blood, but there was no blood. They were sleeping.' It was the worst chemical attack since the Iran-Iraq war. Majed estimates that more than 1,000 people were killed that night.

In March 2014, Majed's wife and son left for Turkey. 'Just one week after they left, my own house was targeted and my son's bed was destroyed.' A month later, Majed joined his family as a refugee. 'I didn't want to leave. I want to help my people, my neighbours, my country. But I have a family too, and I want them to live.'

Interviews by Daniel Adamson

عصيان المدنى

در للصمت بعد اليوم

لارف طريقة



Singing in the kingdom of silence

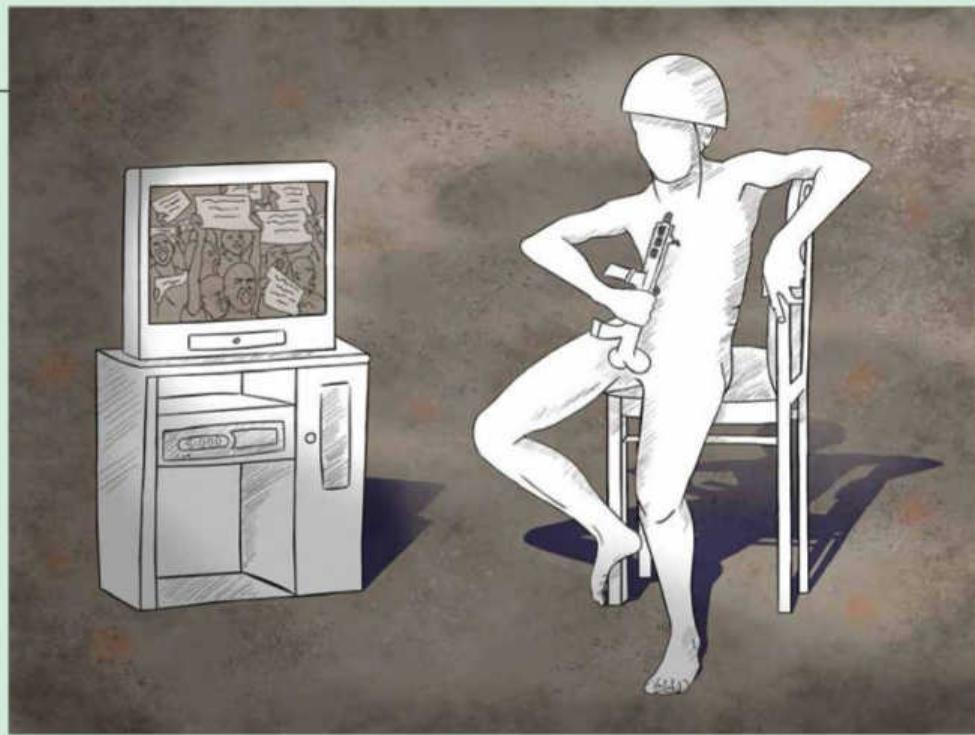
The Syrian revolution released a flood of artistic and intellectual creativity. Four years later, it has not subsided.

In June 2011, a singer called Ibrahim Qualoush performed a song at an anti-regime demonstration in Hama. The song was built around a simple lyric that the vast crowd chanted back at Ibrahim: 'Come on Bashar [Assad], leave!' A few days later, Ibrahim's body was pulled out of the Orontes River. His vocal chords had been cut out.

By killing those who gave voice to the revolution, the Assad regime was trying to re-establish a silence that it had imposed on the country when it took power more than 40 years earlier. But Ibrahim Qualoush was not the only one singing.

انه الـ
لامب

الشعب السوى ع



▲ **Sulafa Hijazi** is a digital artist whose prints reflect the sadism of a masculine, military culture and the nightmarish claustrophobia of its prisons.

'Masturbation'



◀ **Al-Shaab al-Souri Aref Tarikh** ('The Syrian people know their way') is a collective of Syrian artists producing political posters. This image is a comment on breaking the fear instilled by the regime's security apparatus. It reads: 'This is civil disobedience. There is no need to stay quiet any more.'

▲ **Khalil Younes** looks at the mutilation of the human body and the psychology of violence.

'Our Saigon Execution'

All over Syria, the uprising went hand in hand with an outpouring of artistic expression. Political posters, cartoons, graffiti, film, photography, poetry, music – it was as if a deep reservoir of creativity had built up behind the dam of fear, and now, as it crumbled, Syria's talent and imagination was pouring forth.

Painting, song and satire were more than just statements of protest. As the country slid into war, art became a way of keeping alive the nonviolent spirit that had marked the first months of the revolution. No matter how horrific the violence

became, Syria's humanity, wit and defiance continued to find a voice.

Syria's long silence was broken not only by the flood of visual art but also by the emergence of a remarkable citizen journalism movement. The outside world would have known little about the revolt, the crackdown and the growth of an armed resistance were it not for the Syrians who recorded these events on their mobile phones and uploaded the footage to YouTube.

Since those first videos were made, Syria's citizen journalists have become far more

Young Lens collectives have documented every stage of the conflict. The best of these images by citizen photographers have a still, matter-of-fact, eyewitness clarity – tank tracks on asphalt, a man cleaning a gun with a toothbrush, a living room with a mortar hole in the roof and rubble strewn across the carpet.

V



'Waiting', **Lens Young Homsi group**

professional – there are now underground newspapers and radio stations operating all over the country. Among the most dedicated media activists are the self-taught photographers who have organized themselves into the Young Lens collectives, using Facebook to share images of the conflict with a global audience. (See image above)

With more than four million Syrians now living as refugees, it is inevitable that many of those who spoke out in 2011 and 2012 are now in exile. But it would be a mistake to think that Syria's explosion of creativity has been extinguished by four and half years of war.

Kartoneh, an artists' collective from Deir al-Zour, on the Euphrates River in eastern Syria, began to publish striking posters drawn in coloured chalk on Facebook in the early days of the uprising. The posters were one arm of a wider nonviolent struggle to resist the hijacking of the revolution by sectarian groups. The city is now under control of ISIS, and the collective continues to publish on Facebook.

In the Damascus suburb of Daraya, young people have built a library from more than 11,000 books salvaged from the ruins of bombed-out buildings.

And in the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk, a man called Ayham Ahmed has played



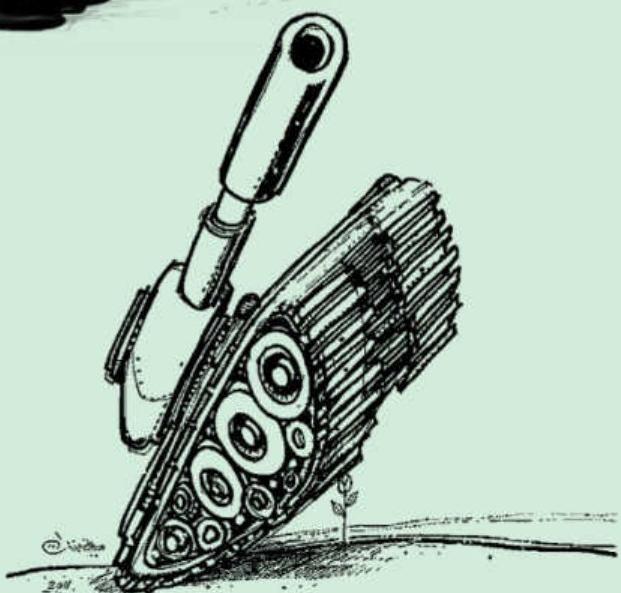
◀ **Alaa Ghazal** crafted this stencil of Assad, with the words 'Step here', and uploaded it to Facebook. The man who has stared out intimidatingly from Syria's walls for so long can now be sprayed onto country's pavements, an object of casual disdain.



◀ **Hani Abbas** is recognized as one of Syria's great cartoonists. Here, Hani depicts regime soldiers not as the brute enforcers of tyranny but as ordinary people struggling to resist the allure of freedom.



▲ 'Syrian Freedom Revolution', **Hussein Khzam**



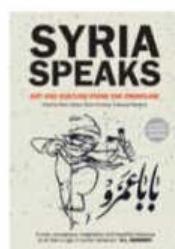
▲ **Ali Ferzat** has relied on the ambiguity of satire to slip his subversive drawings past the dim-witted censors of the state since the 1970s. Since the revolution began, the legendary cartoonist began to mock the regime more directly. In the spring of 2011, for example, he drew Assad trying to hitch a ride in the getaway car of a desperate Muammar Qaddafi. In August, masked men from the regime's security services attacked Ferzat and broke his hands. He now lives in exile in Kuwait.

a beaten-up piano through three years of siege and starvation. The piano was set alight by Islamist militants in April of this year, but Ayham, undeterred, has found a keyboard so he can keep singing with the camp's children (see 'Bravery's Edge', page 21).

Syria's young artists have not just kept going – in some cases, they have become even more ambitious. This summer, a film producer called Qusai Hayani shot an entire television series – part drama, part parody, part political satire – in the ruins of rebel-held Aleppo. The show, called 'Banned in Syria', laughs at the Assad regime but

also pokes fun at the rebels of the Free Syria Army. In June, one of Hayani's location scouts was shot dead by a regime sniper. But filming carried on, and whenever the team stopped for a break, one of the actors – a young man called Jihad Saka Abu Joud – sang revolutionary songs in Aleppo's ruined streets.

Many of the ideas and illustrations in this feature were taken from *Syria Speaks* (Saqi Books, 2014), edited by Malu Halasa, Zaher Omareen and Nawara Mahfoud.





Members of the White Helmets rescue children in Aleppo after an air strike by the Syrian armed forces, June 2014.

Rushing towards death

It has been called the most dangerous job in the world. The White Helmets are a fearless volunteer force that has pulled thousands of Syrians from the rubble left by the regime's deadly barrel bombs.

In February 2014, volunteers from the Aleppo division of the White Helmets raced to the scene of a barrel bombing in the city's Ansari neighbourhood. There they pulled a boy and his mother from the ruins of their three-storey apartment. The woman was frantic: somewhere in the mass of broken concrete and twisted metal was her two-week-old baby.

The volunteers worked through the night, dust whirling in the beams of their headlamps. After 12 hours, one of them was able to reach into a gap beneath a collapsed ceiling and lift the baby clear. It was unharmed.

That baby was the youngest of more than 22,000 people rescued over the past three years by the White Helmets, a volunteer force that now numbers 2,087 men and women across Syria. They warn of impending bomb attacks, treat the wounded, fight fires, pick up body parts and bury the dead. But their first task is to rescue civilians trapped in the rubble of Syria's homes, hospitals and

schools. Most are victims of barrel bombs – oil drums or canisters packed with a mix of explosives, scrap metal and sometimes chemical agents, such as chlorine – that the regime drops on rebel-held areas.

So far, 93 White Helmet volunteers have been killed. Often, after an attack, Assad's helicopter pilots will wait until relatives and rescue workers have gathered before circling back to drop a second bomb.

In June 2015, Raed Saleh, the head of the White Helmets, addressed the UN in New York. He called for a No-Fly Zone over Syria: 'As a patriotic Syrian, I never imagined I would one day ask for foreign intervention in my country,' he said. 'But the lives of innocent women and children that we see dying in our hands every day compel us to ask for any intervention possible to stop the barbaric killing machine led by Bashar al-Assad, including preventing Syrian aircraft from flying.'

Q & A with White Helmets leader RAED SALEH

Who are the White Helmets and how did it start?

We are doctors, medics, tailors, metalworkers, carpenters, entrepreneurs, students, everyone. Before the war, I sold consumer electronics. The teams started spontaneously. In each area of Syria there were volunteer groups helping people in a very amateur way. We were all writing about it on our Facebook pages. So in September 2014, representatives of these local units got together under one leadership, with the same name and logo.



I had a good friend called Rageb Hamdoun. He was martyred in Binish, killed by a second bomb dropped on the same target. And I have other good friends who have lost limbs and been blinded. I have no words to describe those men, no words that can do them justice.

How did you get involved?

When the Syrian army came into my town, Jisr al Shagour (in northwestern Syria), in June 2011, I fled to Turkey with my family. For nine months I worked there in the refugee camps. Then I decided to come back – because Syria is my country. I was one of the founders of an emergency group in the Idlib region, and they elected me as head. Our group was among the first to get professional training in Turkey. Gradually we began setting up other groups, until we had trained teams to work across the whole Idlib governorate.

Why do you do this?

The work has become an obsession for us – helping people, saving lives. You can't imagine the intensity of the happiness you feel when you pull someone out from under the rubble – where he had no hope – after long hours of working, and he is still alive.

Is there one particular memory that stands out?

I'll never forget the massacre in Darkoush (in northern Syria), at the Eid al Adha celebration two years ago. More than 130 people died, and more than 250 were injured. A lot of children were blown to pieces. But at that time we couldn't do anything because we just didn't have the expertise or tools to help. We didn't even have ambulances. I will never forget that day in all my life, what I saw, what I lived. Never. Never. Afterwards I had a breakdown and had to stay in hospital for a while. From that time on I decided I would never give up, that I would keep working with the White Helmets, so that there'll never be another day when we sit there unable to help while people are dying in front of us.

With so many dead and no end in sight, what keeps you going?

Every day we pull people out, most of them children. This generation that we're pulling from the rubble, these kids are going to build a new Syria. When you see this child that you pulled out of the wreckage growing up in front of your eyes, you feel hopeful. You've given this child a new life, to build Syria again.

Many White Helmets volunteers have been killed. Tell us about them.

These men light our path. We've lost 92 men, and yesterday we lost another one in Zabadani, so 93 now.

The kids we pull from the rubble will build a new Syria

Emily Kaske

What support do you want from the international community?

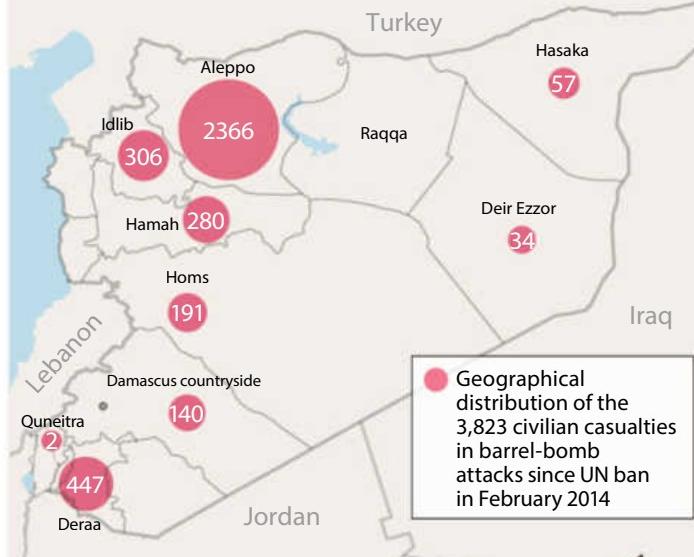
The international community has lost all credibility with the Syrian people. Last year, the UN adopted ruling 2139 to stop the barrel bombing in Syria. But it is still going on. In March 2015 there was another ruling, stating that chlorine gas is a chemical weapon and banning the use of it in Syria. But after this, chlorine gas was used.

For two years the Syrian people have been asking the international community for a No-Fly Zone, but no-one even heard us. As long as there are barrel bombs falling on civilians, how are we going to build communities, how are we going to build services and infrastructure in the liberated areas?

We need to finish off the first source of terrorism, which is Bashar al-Assad, and then the second source of terrorism, which is ISIS. I am certain that when we've got rid of Assad, the Syrian people will be able to finish off ISIS. ■

Interview by Daniel Adamson.
whitehelmets.org

Barrel bomb deaths after UN ban



The Assad regime continues to drop crude, unguided missiles on the civilian population in rebel-held areas. Attacks persist despite UN Security Resolution 2139, passed in 2014, which banned barrel bombs.

The Violations Documentation Center has recorded some 6,500 civilian deaths in barrel bomb attacks since the beginning of the Syrian uprising to May 2015.



Sultan Kitaz / Reuters
Source: The Violations Documentation Center



What do Syrians want?

When the Arab Spring began several years ago, Syrians looked with envy at the freedom movements sweeping Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Change seemed unthinkable in Syria, where everybody knew that you could be imprisoned for merely criticizing the president. And yet the unthinkable happened: in March 2011, Syrians began protesting against more than 40 years of tyranny.

The revolution began peacefully, with Syrians from all backgrounds and walks of life calling for freedom, dignity and democracy. Expatriate Syrians joined the movement and staged demonstrations in national capitals. Peaceful Syrian protesters – often numbering in the hundreds of thousands in a single demonstration – demanded change. ‘One, one, one, the Syrian people are one’ was a common chant, as was the Arabic rhyme, ‘We want freedom, Muslims and Christians alike.’

Not many people would attempt a public survey in a war zone. But RAFIF JOUEJATI wanted the voices of ordinary citizens to be heard.

Four and half years later we can see the results of Assad’s savage assault on his people. Some 11 million are displaced. Barrel bombs, indiscriminate shelling, and mortar attacks have destroyed approximately 80 per cent of the country’s infrastructure. More than 150,000 prisoners of conscience languish in regime prisons and routinely undergo unspeakable torture. The overall death toll surpasses 240,000.

In a country torn apart by violence, our call for democracy has been lost – the narrative of ‘Assad versus extreme Islamists ISIS’ leaves little room for the aspirations of millions of peaceful Syrians. Yet they must have a voice, not only to demand freedom but to articulate and understand what it would mean for all Syrians.

Constitution in waiting

The Freedom Charter project set about filling this gap. Inspired by South Africa’s 1955 Freedom Charter, the central document of the ANC’s long struggle against apartheid, we trained over 100 grassroots activists who then interviewed ordinary Syrians in every

Today’s narrative of ‘Assad versus ISIS’ leaves little room for the voices of millions of peaceful Syrians

Children pose for a picture in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan.

governorate of the country, as well as those now living in the refugee camps of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

The results were astounding. In the midst of a savage civil war, 50,333 people of different social, economic, political, religious and ethnic backgrounds dared to say what they want from a future Syria.

Both activists and interviewees took huge risks. Many of these interviews took place under threat of injury, imprisonment, torture or death. One activist conducting surveys in Quneitra was killed, while two others were critically injured in Lattakia. In eastern Ghouta, outside Damascus, operations were forced to cease after threats by extremist groups.

And what did people want? The right for all Syrians to live in peace and dignity; to freely practise their religious and political beliefs; to be equal citizens before the law.

The Freedom Charter is the most comprehensive effort of its kind. It represents the first step towards a national-unity document based on the opinions, hopes and aspirations of our people.

The Charter is now being circulated among parties with an interest in Syria – governments, NGOs, armed militias – even the Assad regime, and extremist militants.

More Syrians are now signing up to the Charter, adding their voices to those of the 50,333 men and women interviewed. With enough support – our target for signatures is 1 million – the Charter will be a stepping stone in the long process of drafting a new rights-based constitution for all Syrians.

At some point, Assad's assault on Syrians will come to an end, as will his regime. The future of Syria will be negotiated. At every stage in this process we will present the Freedom Charter to all those who have a hand in the rebuilding of the country. They must hear us. We Syrians must be the ones to shape our destiny. ■

Rafif Jouejati set up The Foundation to Restore Equality and Education (FREE-Syria), architects of the Freedom Charter project.

To join or support the Charter's #1Million1Year project, visit free-syria-foundation.org

Resources and further reading

Campaigns

The White Helmets
whitehelmets.org

Free Syria Foundation
free-syria-foundation.org/freedom-charter

Free Syria's Silenced Voices
free-syrian-voices.org

Planet Syria
planetsyria.org

Rights watch-dogs

Violations Documentation Center
vdc-sy.info

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights
syriahr.com/en/

Arts and culture

The Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution
creativememory.org

Citizen journalism

Enab Baladi
nin.tl/EnabBaladiEnglishArticles

Lens Young Homsi
facebook.com/LensYoungHomsi

Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently
raqqa-sl.com/en/

Books

Syrian journalist Samar Yazbek's *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria* (Rider, 2015)

Perhaps the finest single account of Syria's revolution.

Michael Weiss & Hassan Hassan's *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (Regan Arts, 2015)

The best single book on the rise of ISIS.

French scholar Jean-Pierre Filiu's *From Deep State to Islamic State* (C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2015).

Insight on fate of Arab uprisings since 2011, including Syria.

Web-based analysis

Syria Deeply
syriadeeply.org

Open Democracy's Through Syrian Eyes project
nin.tl/OpenDemocracySyrianEyes

Syria in Crisis
carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis

Bloggers

Maysaloon – UK-based Syrian blogger.
maysaloon.org

Qunfuz – Blog of Anglo-Syrian writer Robin Yassin-Kassab.
qunfuz.com

Mali

Queuing to get into the annual

festival in the historic Malian town of Segou, the only thing begging is the question ‘Crisis? What Crisis?’ The well-dressed Malian festival-goers chat blithely, radiant at the prospect of seeing the global Malian superstar Salif Keita play. The security checks are perfunctory; hawkers hawk, but not too aggressively; the great Niger river dawdles lazily in the background under a softening almond sunset; the atmosphere is calm, cultured and welcoming. There’s little to suggest that this country has been living through a nightmare.

Mali was once renowned amongst African nations for its calm, its culture and its welcome. A visitor could happily walk the streets of the capital, Bamako, alone at all hours. The great mud mosque at Djenné, the manuscripts of Timbuktu, the African ‘Hobbiton’ of the Dogon country: all of these drew thousands of tourists every year. Festivals of music, art, theatre and photography attracted international participants and audiences. Mali was a musical powerhouse, whose luminaries – Keita, Amadou & Mariam, Tinariwen, Rokia Traoré, Toumani Diabaté, to name but a few – were feted in every corner of the globe. And, at least after the return of multi-party democracy in 1991, president succeeded president in an

ordered chain of democratic succession that earned global admiration.

Then the dream turned sour. In January 2012, a Touareg revolt against the central government that had been broiling on and off since 1963 exploded back into life. But this time it was hijacked by violent jihadist militias, led by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which routed the Malian army and took control of a chunk of desert and scrubland the size of western Europe. A brutal form of sharia law was imposed, music was banned and the social fabric of the country was ripped to shreds.

Mali had to beg its former colonial master France to put the country back together again, a task that the French-led Operation Serval had accomplished, superficially at least, by the spring of 2013. But even though there have since been successful parliamentary and presidential elections, and a peace deal has been signed with the leaders of the northern insurgency, the country is still reeling from the worst crisis since independence in 1960.

With hindsight, it’s clear that Mali duped the rest of the world during its years of grace. The beauty of its mud mosques, the ancient skill of its *griots* (hereditary bards), its lively and outspoken media and the relative tolerance of its Sufi-inspired Islam: all these were real enough. But its vaunted

democracy was sham, bedevilled by corruption, clientelism, nepotism and low voter turnout. Under President Amadou Toumani Touré (2002–12) all the stats – poverty, health, education – tumbled into the relegation zone of the world rankings.

Unfortunately, there’s been little improvement since the election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK) in September 2013. The north is still tense, and periodically violent. Politicians are still upbraided for their corrupt and self-serving ways. And no improvements in the state’s lamentable health and education systems seem to be in the offing. There are even those who look back nostalgically at the military dictator Moussa Traoré, who held the country in his fearful grip throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Mali’s recent traumas have resulted in a period of deep national soul-searching. Malians cling to their *senankouya* – a complex system of comical inter-ethnic joking that has enabled the country’s multitude of different ethnic groups to live in relative harmony with each other. They also cling to the hope that, despite its complex ethnic and linguistic make-up, despite a social fabric that has been shredded by civil war, Mali can remain true to its national motto: one people, one goal, one faith. ■

Andy Morgan

At a glance



Leader: President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta.

Economy: GNI per capita \$670 (Niger \$410, France \$42,250).

Monetary unit: West African Franc (CFA).

Main exports: Gold, cotton, fertilizers, cattle.

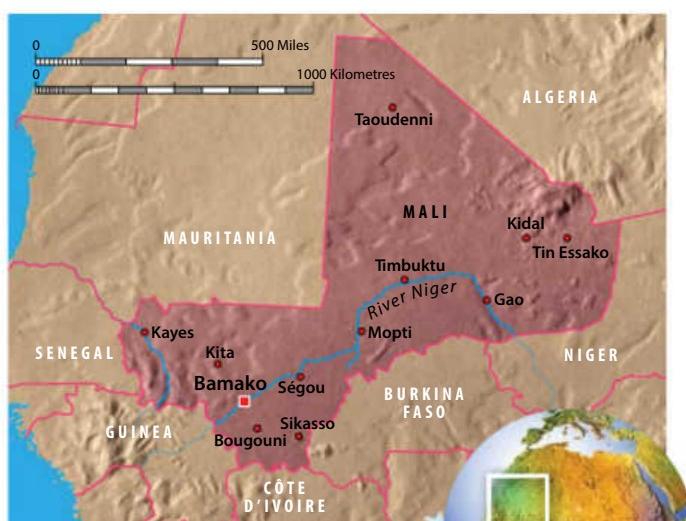
Mali is among the 20 poorest countries in the world and 60% of its population live below the poverty line. Yet despite the crisis of 2012–13, it enjoyed growth of 5.8% in 2014, a figure that’s expected to rise in the coming years.

Population: 15.3 million. People per square kilometre 12 (France 117). Population growth rate 1990–2013 2.8%.

Health: Infant mortality 78 per 1,000 live births (Niger 60, France 4). 67% have access to improved drinking water and 22% to improved sanitation facilities. Lifetime risk of maternal death 1 in 26 (France 1 in 4,300). HIV prevalence rate 0.9%.

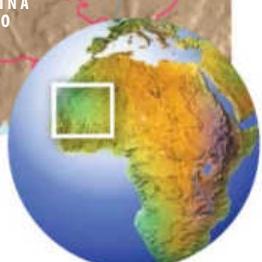
Environment: Mali is the 8th-largest country in Africa, but two-thirds of it is arid or semi-arid desert. Desertification, deforestation (mainly for firewood) and lack of safe drinking water are major problems.

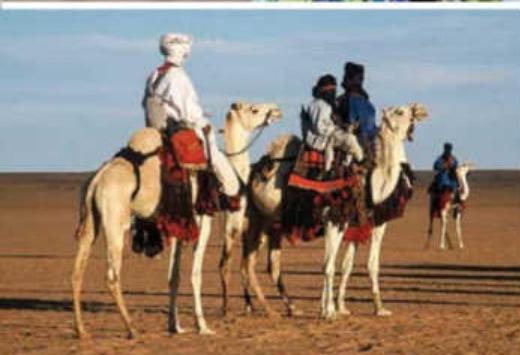
Language: French is the lingua franca. Otherwise Mali’s 13 major indigenous languages are spoken in proportion to the size of each ethnic group, with Bambara on top with 46%, followed by Peul 9.4%, Dogon 7.2%, Soninké 6.4%, Malinké 5.6%, Sonrai (Songhay) 5.6%, Tamashek (Touareg) 3.5%.



Religion: 95% of Malians are Muslims. The other 5% are Christian or animist.

Human Development Index: 0.407, 176th of 187 countries (Niger 0.337, France 0.893).





Top left and bottom right: **Girl washing clothes and boy waiting for porting work at Segou, on the Niger River.** Centre right and bottom middle: **Concertgoers and a dancer in Timbuktu.** Top right: **Looking north across the old bridge across the Niger in the capital, Bamako.** Bottom left: **Camel riders at the Festival in the Desert held at Tin Essako in the northeast.** Photos by Andy Morgan.

Star ratings

Last profiled Jan-Feb 1997



INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★

Although two-thirds of Malians live on or below the poverty line, the income distribution is average, with a GINI Index of 33.0, between Canada and Germany. 1997 ★★★



LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★

55 years (Niger 58, France 82). This is up from 50 in 2008 and so is improving steadily but it is still very low in global terms. 1997 ★



POSITION OF WOMEN ★★

Conservative Muslim groups blocked a more liberal Family Code in 2011. Forced marriage and violence against women are serious problems. Over 1,000 villages have abandoned female genital mutilation, but the practice remains widespread. 1997 ★★★



LITERACY ★

The adult literacy rate is just 34% – the lowest in the world after Niger. Mali's education system suffers from gross under-investment. 1997 ★



FREEDOM ★★★★

Since 1991, Mali has been blessed with a vigorous and pluralistic media, including numerous national newspapers, 'free' radio stations in indigenous languages, and cable TV stations rivalling the national broadcaster ORTM. 1997 ★★★★



SEXUAL MINORITIES ★★

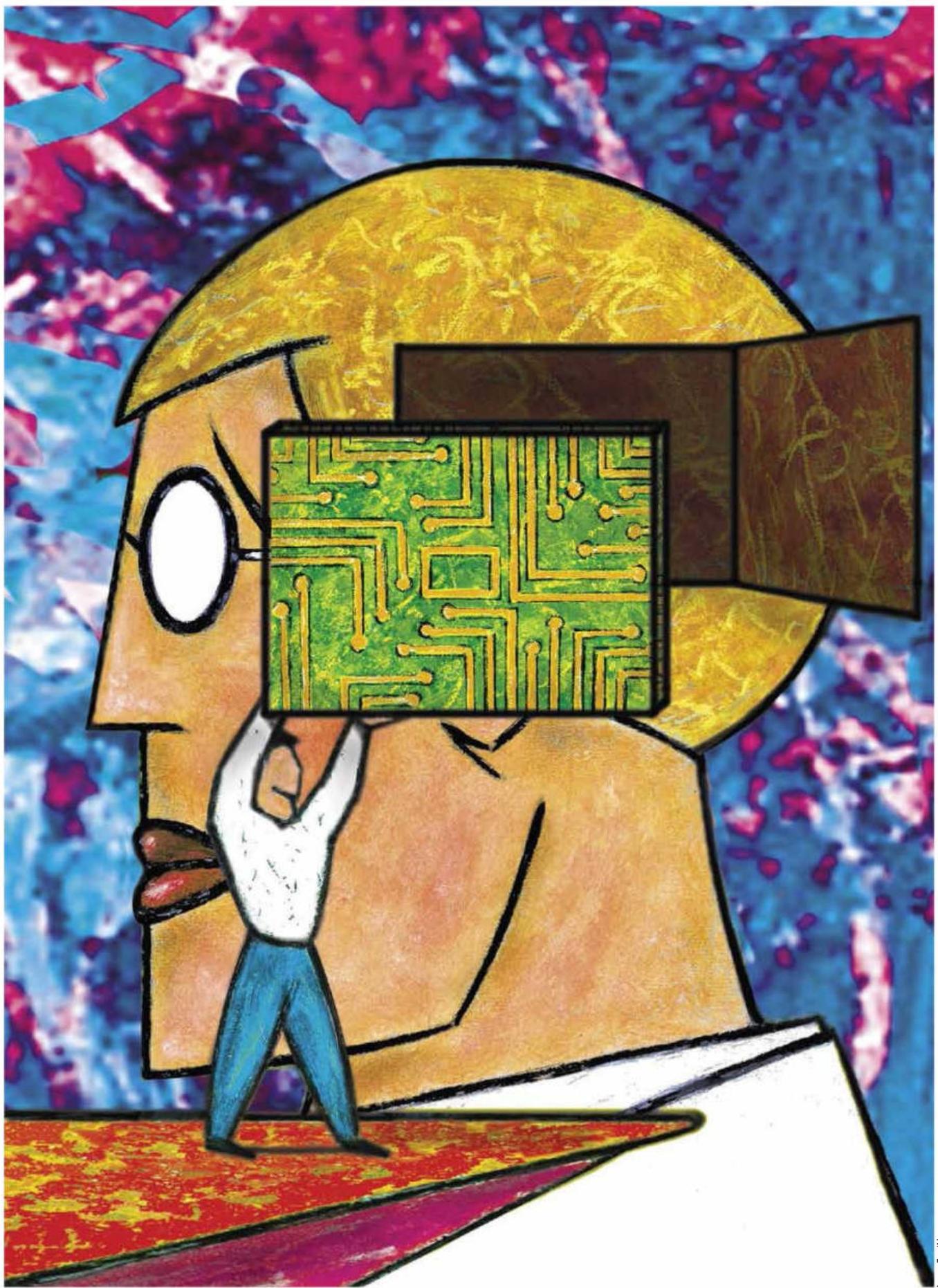
Homosexuality is technically legal but generally considered a degenerate Western 'import'. Gays are at serious risk and their relationships take place in total secrecy, if at all. Transgenderism is unheard of.

NI assessment

NI ASSESSMENT ★★

President Keïta came to power in September 2013 on a surge of hope felt by a nation bruised, traumatized and desperate for change. But that hope now lies in tatters. The President can claim some successes, including the recent signature of the Algiers accords with Touareg-led separatists in the north. But promises to end corruption and restore national pride have proven hollow, a failure symbolized by the President's controversial decision to spend over \$30 million buying a 'presidential' Boeing 737. Mali's perennial problems – poverty, illiteracy and poor health – seem as intractable as ever.

- ★★★★ EXCELLENT
- ★★★★ GOOD
- ★★★ FAIR
- ★★ POOR
- ★ APPALLING



Robots, algorithms and their owners are rapidly taking over the global economy and human beings are becoming superfluous. On the eve of Pope Francis' visit to New York, French economist EDOUARD TÉTREAU calls for a new approach.

Will humans survive the new economy of the 21st century?

When I was a student in the early 1990s, economics was a human science. After 20 years as an entrepreneur, financier and observer of this field, I am no longer sure economics is still a science, and I am increasingly convinced it is becoming less and less humane.

The modern economy is, to put it in fashionable terms, a traditional economy 'augmented', in part, by the digitization and the financialization of human economic activity. This combination will likely cause the next economic accident on a global scale.

Digitization has fundamentally changed the role of human beings in our economy. As the economy adapts to a high-tech world, many people in society have found themselves at risk of being left behind.

The world's top two private employers, McDonald's and Walmart, together employ four million people. Their combined stock-market value is \$325 billion, giving an average 'value' of \$81,250 per employee. The stars of the new economy – Alibaba, Facebook and Google – have a combined stock-market value of nearly \$800 billion. But they barely employ 80,000 people, representing \$10 million of 'value' per employee. A worker in the new economy seems to be a hundred times more 'valuable' than one in the traditional economy. But this value has a whole different meaning if we consider it from the opposite perspective: that today's economy has a hundred times less need for 'human capital' than the traditional economy.

In their study *The Future of Employment*, Oxford researchers Michael Osborne and Carl Benedikt Frey come to an unambiguous conclusion: the digitization of human activities means 47 per cent of current jobs in the US are at risk of disappearing. The trend of replacing people with machines has begun: electronic checkouts are replacing cashiers in supermarkets, while industrial robots are replacing labourers on assembly lines. Foxconn, a Chinese subcontractor of Apple and Nokia, announced in 2012 that it plans to purchase a million robots to replace its workers. In the interest of productivity and profit, it is no longer enough to ensure human beings are well

trained or well paid – it is far more convenient to remove them from the equation altogether. What worker could be more profitable and productive than an industrial robot that never sleeps, never baulks at a task and has no personal problems distracting it from its job? And tomorrow, what programmer could be more effective and creative than a machine with far superior artificial intelligence?

Tomorrow, who will be best positioned to finance and raise an army? Sovereign states, or Google, whose recent acquisitions of several military robotics firms (including Boston Dynamics) mean it will soon be able to build battalions of robots? Robots that will know you well, and be able to recognize you, thanks to your internet searches, your geo-locations, your network of friends and contacts on social networks and Gmail.

This economic revolution is just part of the real scientific, political and philosophical project known as transhumanism, whose ambition is to augment human capabilities by fusing man and machine and, ultimately, to render humans immortal. Transhumanism aims to use technological innovations to 'augment' the body to the point that humans achieve immortality, or at least increased productivity.

Detached from reality

With each technological advance, there looms the threat of the exclusion of 'normal' humans from the economic system – more precisely, those who will not have had the financial means to integrate technological advances alongside or within their own bodies. On the one hand, we will have the poor, all-too-human humans, whose fate is sickness and death; on the other, the super-humans, those who deserve immortal life, or at least paid for it. Are we not facing a technical revolution that will make exceptional progress but at the expense of widening the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' and by pushing millions of people out of jobs, and effectively out of society as a whole, in an already unstable economy?

Alongside digitization, financialization has

What worker could be more profitable and productive than an industrial robot that never sleeps, never baulks at a task and has no personal problems distracting it from its job?

become the main force in the shaping of the 21st-century economy.

There are 7.2 billion human beings on Earth. Together, we generate about \$75 trillion of wealth (GDP) every year. That means each earthling annually generates, on average, about \$10,000. Keep this in mind for the astounding nature of the figures that follow:

Every year, in a market detached from all tangible reality but that of electronic fluctuations and computer clicks, nearly two million billion dollars are exchanged. Or \$1,934,500,000,000,000, to be more precise. This is the foreign-exchange market, where dollars are exchanged for euros, yen for pounds sterling, and so on. This market is 25 times larger than the global production of wealth, and it bears no relation to the social and economic reality of the world. Like the derivatives market – itself worth ‘only’ \$693 trillion, or 10 times the annual wealth produced on Earth – it feeds on wagers, speculations and, marginally, the insurance needs (against risks of fluctuation) of the different actors of the global economy.

Along with digitization, financialization of this kind pushes our economy even further from the reality of a humane marketplace. As the payrolls of big corporations dwindle due to technological advances, their profits continue to increase.

Since 2008, the heads of the world’s six major central banks, by writing lines of code on their computers, have created more than \$8 trillion of ‘real money’ out of nothing. And they have not hesitated to give this cash to banks around the world, in exchange for unsaleable assets.

Central banks, which are supposed to be the guardians of the world’s currencies, have instead again loaded their balance sheets with toxic products. In 2013, the same Wall Street bankers who in 2008 brought the global financial system to the brink of default shared \$26.7 billion in bonuses – \$10 billion more than they had five years earlier.

We are on the brink of another global financial accident, which has the potential to be much worse than anything the economy saw in 2008. In fact, a ‘warning accident’ has already happened. On 6 May 2010, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) experienced a flash crash. At the time, two-thirds of all trades were conducted by robots, or algorithms. For reasons no-one could explain, including the regulators at the US Securities and Exchange Commission, these algorithms went out of control and destroyed \$862 billion worth of stocks in 20 minutes. The situation required a human intervention *in extremis* – the president of the NYSE pulled the plug on the market, arbitrarily cancelling hundreds of thousands of trades, in order to contain the meaningless stock-market crash. It is now considered likely that the mastermind behind this crash was a

single man, a trader named Navinder Singh Sarao, who, in the basement of a suburban London home, used a single computer and simple software to remove a trillion dollars of market value in 20 minutes.

There will be more flash crashes, on larger scales, involving more of the world’s interconnected financial centres. The percentage of market transactions that are automated is constantly increasing, as is high-frequency trading, which represents half of market transactions in the US and which allows carrying out orders at the speed of light, if not beyond. Market algorithms are now capable of carrying out no fewer than 600 transactions in 100 milliseconds – the blink of an eye. Who can top that? Who can prevent a market crash on a much larger scale than the May 2010 flash crash if, instead of a lonely trader, an organized group wanted to cause mayhem on world financial markets?

Human inside

The time has come to impose simple and universal human standards on the globalization, digitization and financialization of our economies. This would have the goal of helping and rewarding businesses and financial institutions to prioritize the human, in a concrete and measurable way, in their generation of wealth, rather than the transhuman or the machine; to favour philanthropy rather than rapacity; and to emphasize sharing rather than predatory behaviour. It is not just a matter of linking the generation of wealth with effective job creation – this would be a good start, but it is not enough. Working conditions and their impact on the environment must be of foremost concern. Of equal consideration should be the living conditions of the growing number of people who cannot directly participate in the productive economy.

We are facing an increasingly barbaric world, where human conscience is disappearing. This month, Pope Francis is due to visit New York – the centre of today’s global economy and the headquarters of the United Nations. He is expected to speak about the imbalances currently plaguing the global economy. I dream that such a figure might bring the leaders of all the great religions with him, with no conditions or exceptions. And that together, they send the economic, financial and political leaders of the 21st century this simple message: tear down this wall. That they call on the global elites to tear down the uncompromising barriers of insane money and alienating technologies, which divide humans and exacerbate inequalities, rivalries and violence between them. This invisible wall that pushes human beings out of democratic, economic and social life, for the benefit of soulless machines.

Tear down this wall, before it is too late. ■

**We are
facing an
increasingly
barbaric
world, where
human
conscience is
disappearing**



Edouard Téreau’s book *Beyond the Wall of Money* (in French *Au-delà du mur de l’argent*) is published in France by Stock on 9 September.



Team Obama cashes in

For more than six years, Eric Holder was the chief law enforcement officer in the United States. Appointed by President Obama as Attorney General in 2009, he served until this spring, when he returned to the law firm of Covington & Burling.

crisis, for example, was Hank Paulson, former CEO of Goldman Sachs.

Spoiler alert: Goldman was one of the banks that received billions of dollars in government bailout funds.

Of course, such suspect appointments are not unique to

advocates aimed at rolling back the power of teachers' unions.

Anti-union advocacy has become something of a trend. Having departed the White House in 2013, famed presidential adviser David Plouffe serves as a top strategist for the ride-sharing



As Attorney General, Holder was responsible for prosecuting the bankers responsible for the financial crisis. To say he was not vigorous in pursuing this task is putting it mildly: not a single executive was ever convicted for crimes related to the meltdown.

Among its clientele, Covington has counted such Wall Street mainstays as Wells Fargo, Bank of America and JP Morgan Chase. Holder now stands to make millions defending them. The firm went so far as to keep a corner office open for Holder for years on end, waiting out his time in the Justice Department.

This, my friends, is known as the 'revolving door'.

As the Obama era winds to a close, we can witness those who came to Washington on a tide of 'hope' and 'change' wash back out on a current of cash, taking up corporate America's offers to join them as lobbyists, board members, strategists and experts in government relations.

Part of the revolving-door problem occurs when political appointees come straight from the industries that they are supposed to oversee as public servants. George W Bush's Secretary of the Treasury during the 2008 financial

Republicans. Senator Elizabeth Warren, a resolute Wall Street critic, pointed out late last year that 'three of the last four Treasury secretaries under Democratic presidents held high-paying jobs at Citigroup either before or after serving at Treasury'. Other important Obama administration officials, including current US Trade Representative Michael Froman, made millions at the same bank.

But the revolving door does not stop there. The other half of the problem is that, when political officials depart, those who have kept cosy relations with business are handed choice private-sector jobs by companies seeking to monetize their Rolodexes.

'Seven years into the Obama administration, this is the time when people are... cashing in,' one watchdog told the *Guardian*, noting that Obama's efforts to address the problem were 'about as solid as Swiss cheese'.

Former Budget Chief Peter Orszag now rakes in \$4 million per year at Citigroup. Ex-White House press secretary Robert Gibbs, meanwhile, is the new global head of communications for McDonald's. Over the past year Gibbs led a national public-relations drive on behalf of charter-school

company Uber, which is at war with the National Taxi Workers Alliance – as well as with taxi unions in countries including France and Mexico.

Plouffe was recruited to Uber by former Obama campaign manager Jim Messina, whom *BloombergBusiness* has described as 'Silicon Valley's go-to government fixer'.

Messina is a busy man. He also runs a big-money political action committee supporting Hillary Clinton, and he served as a consultant to the British Conservative Party in the 2015 elections. (Sorry about that!)

It is a cherished notion in US political ideology that the market and democracy go happily hand in hand. The purveyors of that myth keep the revolving door turning.

After helping British Prime Minister David Cameron to victory, Jim Messina trumpeted his plans for the next year: 'I'm coming home tomorrow,' he said, 'and it's whatever it will take to get Hillary [elected].'

Mark Engler's new book *This Is An Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-first Century* will be released in 2016. He can be reached via the website DemocracyUprising.com

FILM

Theeb (100 minutes)

written and directed by **Naji Abu Nowar**

Theeb is a 10-year-old Bedouin boy, who idolizes his older brother Hussein. They live with their family, goats and camels in the desert – although the coming of the railway has all but finished off their traditional role of guiding pilgrims to Mecca. It's 1916, and the British are trying to unite local tribes against their Ottoman rulers. The old trails are dangerous, but when an arrogant and insistent British officer turns up at their camp, they respect the established code of hospitality. Next morning, Hussein, chosen to guide the officer and his Arab companion to a desert well, sets off with them. Theeb sneaks along too, following their camel trails, on a donkey.

Nowar's debut film won't get the audience it deserves because it's in Arabic, with only a smattering of English. But it's a gripping, stunningly set, sweaty, fly-ridden coming-of-age adventure, which twists and turns and has real bite.

★★★ ML



Stunning scenery and gripping adventure in Naji Abu Nowar's *Theeb*.

45 Years (93 minutes)

written by **Andrew Haigh** and **David Constantine**, directed by **Andrew Haigh**

Kate and Geoff are comfortably off and just a week away from 45 years of marriage. Kate is making final arrangements for the big party that didn't happen after 40 years when Geoff had a heart operation. Out of the blue, Geoff gets a letter. It's from a coroner in Switzerland, where, back in the early 1960s, before he had met Kate, he'd been trekking with his then girlfriend, Katya. She had fallen into a crevasse and disappeared. Now, her body has appeared.

In writer-director Haigh's previous film, *Weekend*, two people meet, and over 48 hours, connect and open up to each other. Here two people have to contend with what hasn't come out over 45 years. 'They' have stopped smoking, but Geoff immediately starts up again. That night, Kate wakes up after hearing Geoff rummaging in the attic – he's searching out Katya's old letters. When Geoff is out next day, Kate checks the attic – a photo of Katya in the Alps shows she was probably pregnant when she died.

In part, this is a film about middle-class English reserve and control – she's a retired headteacher, who struggles with her emotions. She smokes to calm herself, is icy, passive-aggressive, never shouting or raging. He's caring, but not one to indulge in introspection or disclosure. At 70-something they are both still developing as people.

It's also about a generation who came of age in the 1960s – and its

lost potential. Geoff, a one-time union shop steward, laments his mate Len's boasting about his grandson. This was a man they used to call Red Len – or Lenin – and his grandson, we hear, is a banker. Charlotte Rampling and Tom Courtenay are subtle and convincing as the couple. The film is unsentimental and unblinking about them, their milieu, their generation. Well written and put together, **45 Years** also has a great soundtrack.

★★★ ML

FILM



Tom Courtenay and Charlotte Rampling star in the subtle and unblinking *45 Years*.

Resistance

by Souljazz Orchestra (*Strut Records, STRUT 136, CD, LP, download*)

Hailing from Ottawa's Souljazz Orchestra, this infectious album kicks off as it means to go on. To blasting trumpets, sax and a samba rhythm comes the chorus of **Resistance**'s opener, 'Greet the Dawn': 'If you kick a dog enough, the dog bites back.' (These last four words are accentuated by saxophone stabs from Ray Murray and drum thumps from Marielle Rivard and Philippe Lafrenière.) Band leader (and vintage keyboard player) Pierre Chrétien has his band dancing towards righteousness, for this is an album that orients its funk towards a social conscience. The orchestra – mostly a sextet that makes a big noise – has been around now for over 12 years, its solid funk basis attracting a strong following. But on **Resistance**, the orchestra has refocused itself for a fifth album in the wake of the Iraq war, the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring, to pleasing effect.

With its heart located in West African music and that of the francophone Caribbean, there is a lot for the orchestra to play with, not least its first foray into vocals. With Rivard on mic, 'As The World Turns' is a jingly, high-hat-led, Latin-nuanced groove that could

MUSIC



Resistance – a knowing, cheeky defiant album.



be speaking of Armageddon. 'Shock and Awe', on the other hand, dispenses with the most recent US president from the Bush dynasty with a fast-paced, zouk-influenced *coupé-décalé* music from Côte d'Ivoire. This is a knowing, defiant and cheeky album, with warmth in its vintage instruments, rhythms and fire in its soul.

★★★ LG
souljazzorchestra.com

MUSIC

Amores Pasados

by John Potter and Others
(ECM Records, 2441 CD)

At first glance, **Amores Pasados** looks like another of the perfectly recorded works in which the German label, ECM, specializes. Former Hilliard Ensemble tenor John Potter is joined by lutists Ariel Abramovich and Jacob Heringman, while Norwegian vocalist, fiddler and medievalist Anna Maria Friman completes the line up. The music that they play and interpret is mostly 17th century... except when it's by Sting, Genesis keyboard player Tony Banks and former Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones. What's going on?

Simply this: **Amores Pasados** asks us to think about what a popular song is. Go back to the era of any of the 17th-century Thomas Campion compositions included here and they would have been simply songs – not classical, not folk – just songs. The division in genre would have been between sacred and secular and even then there would have

been much slippage. Potter, who is behind the genre-busting Dowland Project, clearly takes a delight in his musicological reordering of things. This is far more than a curatorial strategy; the placing of contemporary rock-star-penned lute songs in a frame with much earlier ones, draws out ideas about what makes a modern

song ancient and the other way round. There are surprises, too: Sting's 'Bury Me Deep in the Greenwood', originally written for the film *Robin Hood*, sounds too early to be modern, but that's the delight of this excellent recording.

★★★ LG
ecm.com



Rethinking song on the genre-bending Amores Pasados.



Now and at the Hour of Our Death

by **Susana Moreira Marques** translated by Julia Sanches (*& Other Stories*, ISBN 978 19082 76629)

Abandoned by the young, the rural Trás-os-Montes area of northern Portugal is inhabited by the old and the dying. Susana Moreira Marques accompanies a palliative care team to hear the stories of those for whom the ‘hour of our death’ (the title is taken from the Catholic prayer, the Hail Mary) is at hand, and those who must see their loved ones through their final days. The author mixes her protagonists’ words with her own musings, creating a beautiful meditation on life and death.

Not surprisingly, this slim volume is full of emotions, but not necessarily the ones you would expect. A woman reacts to her father’s death by screaming and wanting to hit people;

a nurse is plagued by feelings of inadequacy and guilt if he is not with each of his patients in their last hours. There’s a wife who decides not to tell her husband that he is dying of cancer, and a dying man who has to be hidden from his wife because, in her dementia, she is overly amorous.

These are real people, living and dying real, messy lives and deaths. As Moreira Marques says, ‘there is little that is literary about death’, yet her writing – and the stoic, poignant first-person accounts she shares – shows that there is poetry in the most unexpected places.

★★★ JL
andotherstories.org

BOOKS

Kill Chain Drones and the Rise of High-Tech Assassins

by **Andrew Cockburn** (*Verso*, ISBN 978 17816 89462)

In February 2014 the US military announced that its iconic U2 bomber planes would be retired, as would its fleet of A-10s, in favour of the unmanned Global Hawk system. This completed a meteoric rise for the ‘drone’ planes, a trajectory meticulously documented by Andrew Cockburn in **Kill Chain**. It is both an illuminating case study of the military-industrial complex in the 21st century and a compelling shadow history of the ‘war on terror’.

The technology’s shortcomings – its sensors have had trouble distinguishing between men and boys, and even between helmeted US marines and turbaned Taliban forces, with predictably disastrous consequences – are often exacerbated by the trigger-happy incompetence of the soldiers

tasked with using it; as one Nevada officer tells Cockburn, ‘to be honest sir, everyone around here, it’s like *Top Gun...*’

Even supposing it all worked smoothly, which it doesn’t, there would remain the vexed question of the legality of ‘targeted killings’ of ‘high-value individuals’ or, to call a spade a spade, extrajudicial executions. Much has been sacrificed in the decade-and-a-half of permanent emergency since 9/11 and the blithe euphemism ‘collateral damage’ has become so commonplace we no longer baulk at its dehumanizing coldness. **Kill Chain** puts the innocent civilian victims of the ‘war on terror’ at the centre of the narrative, where they rightly belong.

★★★ HB
versobooks.com



The Body Snatcher

by **Patrícia Melo** translated by Clifford E Landers (*Bitter Lemon Press*, ISBN 978 19085 24539)

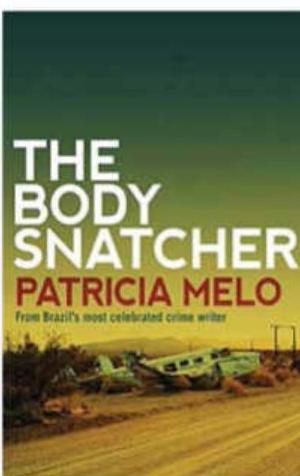
The set-up of **The Body Snatcher** is not particularly original: aimless drifter lucks upon valuable item, disastrous consequences ensue. Of course, what the author does with this hackneyed theme is all-important and, fortunately, Brazilian crime writer Patrícia Melo has given us a tale that positively drips with atmosphere and menace.

The story is set in Corumbá on the Brazilian-Bolivian border and, within the first few pages, our narrator – hero is certainly not appropriate – has been the sole witness to a fatal plane crash and has helped himself to a kilo of cocaine from the plane as well as the dead pilot’s watch and rucksack. Predictably, his attempts to sell the drugs and finagle the situation to his advantage lead him into

murky moral territory. After a drug deal goes disastrously wrong, he ends up owing huge sums to a murderous drug cartel. His ingeniously witless solution to his dilemma is to blackmail the family of the dead pilot for the return of their son’s body. Enlisting the help of his girlfriend, who conveniently works in the town morgue, his plan winds to the inevitable grisly denouement.

Melo’s prose creates a compelling aura of claustrophobia and paranoia and she mixes her brew of venality, corruption and duplicity with relish. She pulls off the trick of getting the reader to care about some pretty unpleasant characters and her narrative tugs us along relentlessly until the last breathless, gruesome pages.

★★★ PW
bitterlemonpress.com



The Seven Good Years

by Etgar Keret translated by Sondra Silverston, Miriam Shlesinger, Jessica Cohen, Anthony Berris (Granta, ISBN 978 17837 80464)

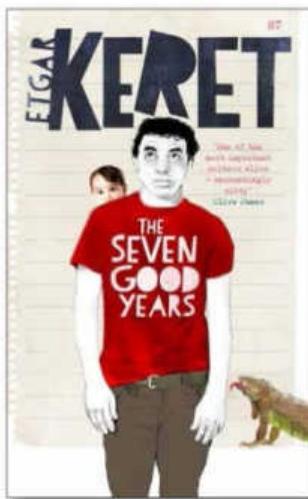
Israeli author Etgar Keret, well known for his acerbic and witty stories, here turns his attention to a memoir of sorts, covering events taking place during the first seven years of the life of his son, Lev. Episodic rather than comprehensive, Keret recounts happenings both momentous and banal with the same engaging mix of naïve astonishment and sly humour. Whether discussing rocket attacks on Tel Aviv, coming to terms with the serious illness and death of his father, or navigating the pitfalls of his son's pre-school class, Keret's oblique approach and winning self-deprecation give the reader much to appreciate. In these pages, the personal is most decidedly political.

Initially, **The Seven Good Years** presents as an artlessly stitched-together series of anecdotes about the irritations and oddities

of everyday life. This approach allows Keret's deeper themes – fatherhood, life in a war zone, prejudice, identity and belonging – to emerge all the stronger for being lightly touched upon rather than hammered home. The author can move effortlessly from a moving account of a trip to Warsaw where he uncovers his family roots, to dealing with a particularly persistent telemarketer, without the transition feeling forced or awkward.

The writing here combines playfulness with pathos and the author's dogged quest for the nugget of truth amid the crashingly ordinary is ultimately life-affirming. Keret's phrase about his father's bedtime stories – 'filled with magic and compassion' – could serve as a perfect description of this gem of a book.

★★★★★ PW
grantabooks.com



Also out there...

MUSIC *Adana* (Muziekpubliek), from the Armenian-Belgian duduk player **Vardan Hovanessian** and the Turkish-Belgian multi-instrumentalist **Emre Gültekin**, is a remarkable album.

The theme is the Armenian genocide and its continuing reverberations: one track is titled 'Hrant Dink', for the Turkish-Armenian editor who was assassinated in 2007. Folk melodies, new compositions and guest artists make this a gentle work of reconciliation.

Jerusalem in my Heart,
Radwan Ghazi Moumeh's

Montreal/Beirut-based music/art/film project was featured in our review pages in 2013 with its debut album. Now Moumeh is back and *If He Dies, If If If If If If* (Constellation) is a cracker of electronica, Arabic drones, snips of folk music and more besides. With a back cover showing a blurred photo of Palestinian children seconds before they were blown to pieces by an Israeli gunboat while playing on a Gaza beach, you know that the surging laments here are not simply for effect.



Vardan Hovanessian and Emre Gültekin on the remarkable *Adana*.

FILM In Kristof Bilsen's exceptional doc, **Elephant's Dream**, deferential, demoralized, resilient but hardly-ever-paid public-sector workers sit and dream of other more productive lives. The counter clerk in the grand Kinshasa post office has no customers; the stationmaster hardly ever sees a train. The fire-brigade lieutenant has a working fire engine but no hydrants it can connect to. Dominique Mollard's eye-opening doc, **Adrift: People of a Lesser God**, tells the stories of determined escapees from economic stasis and penury who end up drifting powerlessly in a small leaky fishing

boat somewhere between Mauritania and the Canary Islands. In Anna Muylaert's sharp, entertaining and surprising **The Second Mother**, the 50-something housemaid to a wealthy São Paulo family reassesses her life and relationship to the family when her bluff, matter-of-fact daughter comes to stay.

How to change the world shows us dramatic film and photography in the early days of Greenpeace when a bunch of crazy, courageous Vancouver hippy activists sailed off to stop nuclear bomb tests and to save whales and seals.

BOOKS Youssef El-Ginghy is a British doctor, working in east London. His **How to Dismantle the NHS in 10 Easy Steps** (Zero Books) is a precise and devastating explanation of how a public health service – long the envy of the world – is furtively being dismembered for private, corporate gain by the likes of Virgin, Serco et al. The facts laid bare by El-Ginghy cry out for resistance. Arm yourself with this succinct book.

Everything is Happening – Journey into a Painting by Michael Jacobs (Granta), tells the story of the author's lifelong relationship with 'Las Meninas', the enigmatic, intriguing and ahead-of-its-time work by Diego Velazquez. Due to Jacobs' premature death in 2014, this eloquent personal memoir, fused with the painting's own dramatic life-story, was completed by his friend Ed Vulliamy. A compellingly original one-off – rather like 'Las Meninas' itself.

Maia Gedde's **International Development and Humanitarian Assistance: a career guide** (Routledge) is a must for anyone wanting to enter the field today or to further their work in it. Clear, practical and comprehensive – with 54 areas of specialism! – it's full of first-hand experiences and advice.

REVIEWS EDITOR: **Vanessa Baird** email: vanessab@newint.org

Reviewers: Houman Barekat, Louise Gray, Jo Lateu, Malcolm Lewis, Peter Whittaker

STAR RATING

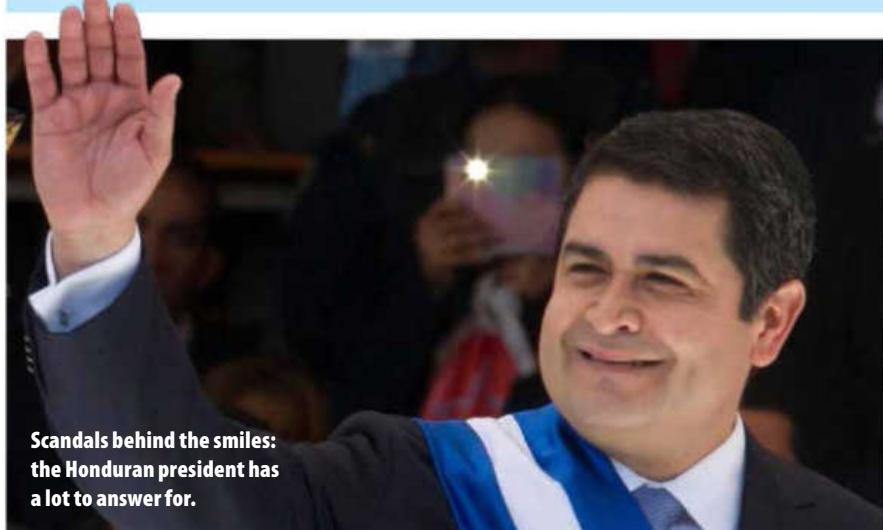
★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★ VERY GOOD ★★★ GOOD ★★ FAIR ★ POOR



Juan Orlando Hernández

Job: President of Honduras

Reputation: Youthful oligarch specializing in deniability



President Juan Orlando Hernández

is keeping Honduras in the dark ages. The Central American country remains an old-school relic of the worst days of torture and assassination from the 1970s and 1980s that most of Latin America now happily see as a museum piece. It's still all here – the disappearances, the corruption, the military brutality, the torture, the assault on workers defending their rights, and the desperate oligarchs willing to do anything to defend their privileges.

Hernández was catapulted to power in a 2009 military coup against the duly elected government of Manuel Zelaya after his rather surprising turn to the Bolivarian Left. Hernández now has a fig leaf of respectability following his 2013 election victory, when he edged out Xiomara Castro (Zelaya's wife) by playing the fear card. He championed the militarizing of Honduran society with a famous promise to put 'a soldier on every corner'. During the campaign, several activists and candidates from Castro's Libre Party were assassinated.

Rather than fighting crime, there is ample evidence that the military under Hernández have become the criminals. Back in the bad old 1980s, Hondurans who dared speak out were regularly 'disappeared' by the special military Battalion 3-16. Subsequently, this kind of political murder had virtually disappeared. Now, leaders (including the notorious Billy Joya) of Battalion

3-16 are coming back as propagandists for state terror and 'security' advisers to Los Tigres, a special unit implicated in post-coup repression. Victims of disappearance have included dozens of LGBT advocates, over 100 land-rights activists, more than 30 journalists, labour activists and at least 20 opposition candidates and organizers.

Despite the country's many problems, Hernández must enjoy being in power – otherwise why would he have had his hand-picked Supreme Court overturn the law strictly limiting the President to one four-year term? This was exactly the move that Hernández and his friends used as an excuse to stage a coup against the 'undemocratic' Zelaya in 2009 – so how do you spell hypocrisy?

While Hernández plays his constitutional fiddle, Honduras remains the poorest and most unequal country in Latin America. With a personal stake in coffee plantations, the media and the hotel industry, inequality is not a major concern for the president. But Hondurans have shown a growing taste for justice that is leading the country's oligarchy to opt for ever more autocratic methods to shore up their ill-gotten wealth.

The recent murder of peasants – opposed to turning their small-holdings over to palm plantations for 'green' energy or various mining projects – was designed to show there can be no standing in the way of

corporate progress. The campaign of repression by Hernández's government includes shutting down the indigenous Garifuna radio stations that dot the Honduran coast and have been used to rally environmental opposition to mines, dams and hydro projects.

But no-one should say that the corporate sector is unwilling to pay for services rendered. A recent scandal over illegal campaign finance forced Hernández to admit that his National Party had taken such contributions from corporate donors. Of course, he knew nothing about it. Then there was the social-security scandal where National Party worthies were accused of cashing in on \$330 million stolen from the country's threadbare Social Security Institute. The prosecutor in the case was forced to flee the country because of death threats. One key witness took 14 bullets for his trouble. Hernández denies all knowledge.

Sadly, it seems the US and Canadian governments are comfortable with old-style authoritarian and oligarchic Latin American political culture. Hernández is pliant on what really matters: the 'investor rights' of the mining industry and a staunch opposition to the leftward swing of the continent. But times are turning tense for *El Presidente* as the scandals continue to deepen: by early July tens of thousands were braving the streets of the capital, Tegucigalpa, risking repressive violence to demand his resignation. ■

LOW CUNNING: Hernández trumpets his brave battle against narco gangs while refusing to clean up corruption in his own security forces.

SENSE OF HUMOUR:
Hernández is known as *cipote malcriado* (the spoiled kid). Sadly, he doesn't get the joke.



Sources: Telesur, the *Guardian*, upsidedownworld.org, Al Jazeera, Wikipedia, Center for Economic and Policy Research, BBC, huffingtonpost.com



In defence of anger

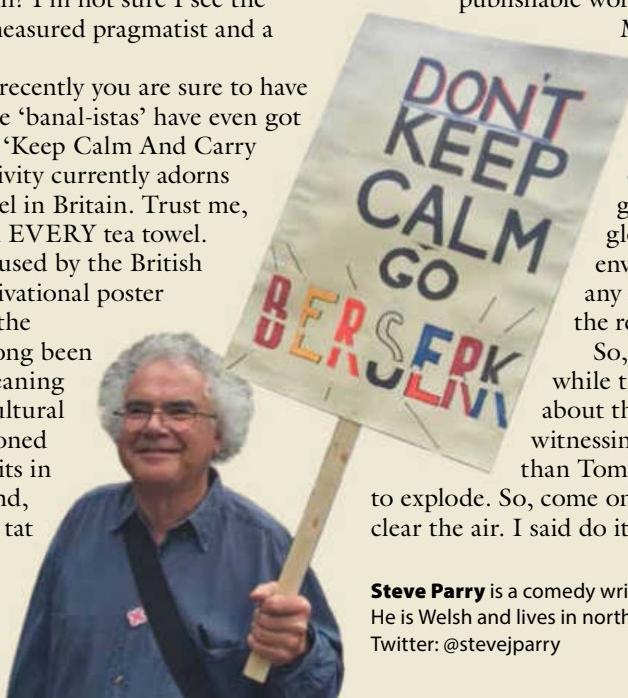
All right! I admit it. I have a temper. A volcanic, over-the-top, soap-opera-overacting-style temper. But as a grown up, I like to think I keep it reasonably in check most of the time. (Expect a stern letter from my girlfriend in the next issue demanding a correction.) I did once consider anger management, but just seeing the word ‘management’ got me feeling fierier than Ed Sheeran’s sunburn.

One of the things that really gets me angry is other people’s lack of anger. It baffles me. It really gets my goat. Why haven’t they got goats? I mean, are these people unthinking, uncaring, or both? I’m not sure I see the difference between being a measured pragmatist and a craven drip.

If you have visited Britain recently you are sure to have spotted that these unflappable ‘banal-istas’ have even got their own ubiquitous slogan: ‘Keep Calm And Carry On’. This rallying cry to passivity currently adorns every single mug and tea towel in Britain. Trust me, I’m not exaggerating. I mean EVERY tea towel.

The phrase was originally used by the British government in an iconic motivational poster campaign in the build-up to the Second World War, but has long been stripped of any context or meaning in a frenzy of post-modern cultural thievery. Cheap junk emblazoned with this insipid idiom now sits in every souvenir shop in the land, alongside other Great British tat like Princess Diana key rings, Union Jack underwear and those Prince Harry toys that rip a moonie when you flick

Steve Parry



them in the face. I may have made one of these items up.

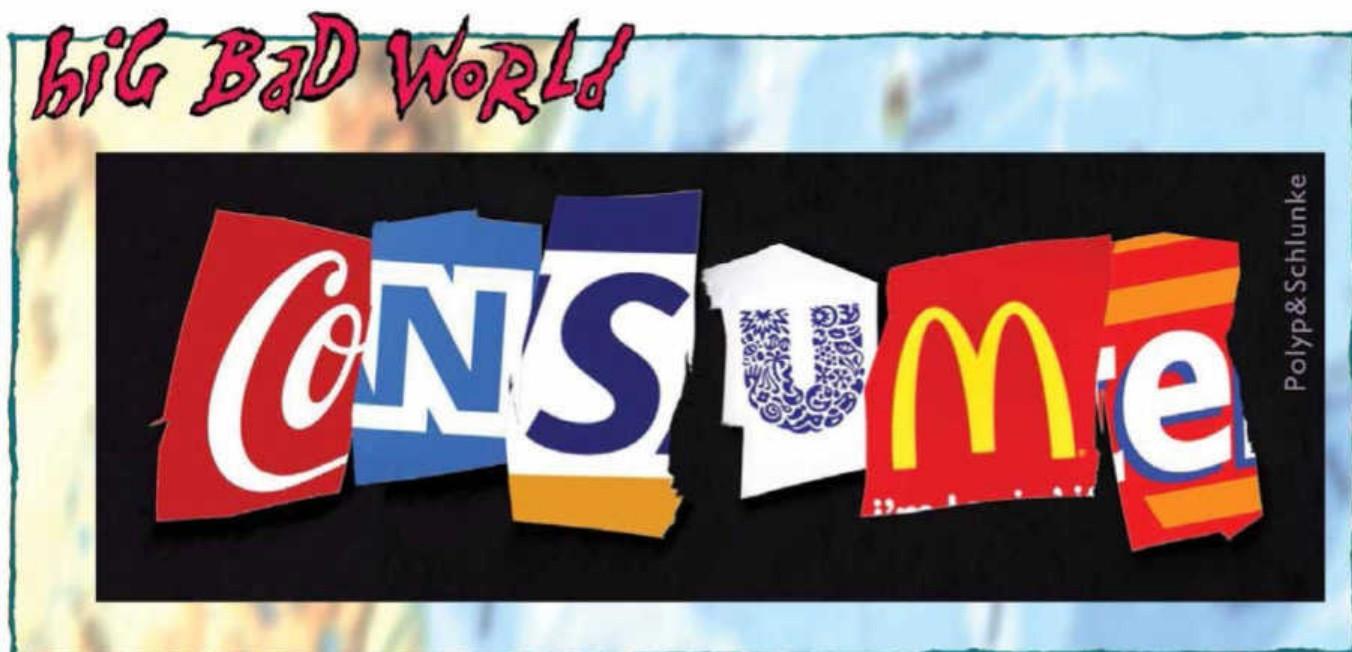
Having obviously never been a fan of the saying, I was delighted, on a recent anti-austerity demo, to see a fellow protester holding a placard with the refreshingly subversive touché to the cliché: ‘Don’t Keep Calm. Go Beserk.’

And I couldn’t agree more. People are far too calm. That means all of us, even me in full supermodel-with-a-splinter mode. I’m not suggesting that we all start throwing tantrums at the drop of a hat, but if we don’t throw one big collective tantrum soon we will be, for want of a less publishable word, banjaxed.

My genuine worry is that the way things are moving it won’t be long before rage is all we are left with. But, worse than that, it will be impotent rage. If we sit on our hands while neoliberalism goes on the offensive across the globe destroying economies and the environment and riding roughshod over any semblance of democracy, by the time the red mist descends it will be too late.

So, best we lose our shit now, I say, while there is still time to do something about the global corporate coup we are witnessing. Personally, my fuse is shorter than Tom Cruise’s inside leg, and I’m primed to explode. So, come on! Let’s do it! If nothing else, it’ll clear the air. I said do it! DO IT NOW!!! ■

Steve Parry is a comedy writer, performer and political activist. He is Welsh and lives in north London. You can contact him on Twitter: @stevejparry



Polyp & Schlunke

Calling time on the MDGs

Illusion continues to trump reality in the murky business of international development, writes MAGGIE BLACK.

Fifteen years ago, the UN's member states committed themselves to a dramatic reduction in global poverty by 2015, signing up to a set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The verdict is now in, and – surprise, surprise – UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has announced that, despite a few glitches, the campaign has been a roaring success. A billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty. The proportion of undernourished people has dropped from 24 to 13 per cent. And so on, through a carefully qualified list of MDG achievements.¹

The mainly full, slightly empty glass depicted as the MDG outcome was utterly predictable, and the statistics used to illustrate it were picked for that purpose. It would be easy to select others to show the outcome in less rosy hues. But it seems invidious to do so because the UN and its Game of Goals is the only vehicle for international commitment to improvements in the human condition, as opposed to neoliberal adulation of the market and economic growth. That is a powerful argument for letting the Goals soldier on – a classic example of illusion trumping reality in the murky business of international development.

But reality has to be addressed too. First is the serious doubt, especially if you count from the conveniently backdated MDG baseline of 1990, whether there really has been a significant reduction in the numbers of the very poor. Then there is the question of the measurement of this poverty – less whether the sums are right than whether measuring it has become a displacement activity for doing something about it. And finally comes the most important question. Why is this exercise rooted in a top-down, donor-driven vision, not in an analysis informed by the actual situation, views and opinions of those 'poor' the whole campaign is supposed to be about?

These are among the questions addressed in *International Development: Illusions and Realities*, one of the new titles in New Internationalist's relaunched NoNonsense series.

In the last 15 or 25 years – is this a coincidence? – the development industry has undergone a process of professionalization

and 'academicization'. This has enabled large amounts of aid to be absorbed by university departments, research institutes and private consultancies created to expand donor influence and pay cheques. Even NGOs have been affected. The industry's soul has been captured by quasi-corporate entities whose concern for the predicaments of the 'global poor' is synthetic. They have become data sets, anecdotal case illustrations or, simply, pawns.

Irrelevant goals

Meanwhile the 'development' experience of many of them has been negative. True, a significant number, especially in China, have joined the economic mainstream and climbed a rung or two up the economic ladder. In other cases, 'development' has stolen their resource base and destroyed their livelihoods. Dispossession has been accompanied by violence, not by reasonable compensation or a decent job. If your land has been grabbed or your community torched, Goals are irrelevant. This anti-poverty agenda was established by experts who have never familiarized themselves closely, or even at all, with the varied situations of the rural, urban, indigenous, female, child or ethnic minority poor.

Suppose you are one of the millions of people in Africa, Asia and Latin America who can only afford to eat five meals a week. The global percentage reduction in hunger will be immaterial. If you are drowning off the coast of Libya or watching a bulldozer flattening your home in slum-dog Mumbai, your child's vaccination against measles or bed-net against malaria is irrelevant. In the Goals context, such deficits are only noticed as regrets that 'inequalities' are growing.

Visit a slum in Kinshasa, Dhaka or Port-au-Prince, or a mega-dam or mining site where communities are being erased, and the degradation and brutality of poverty is tangible. No statistics can do it justice. But statistics is what Goals are all about. And so, inevitably, the statistics mislead. The much-vaunted billion people lifted out of \$1.25-a-day poverty were mostly in China during its economic miracle of the 1990s.² Since 2000 little has changed.

Measuring poverty has become more important 'professionally' than doing something about it

Today, at least a billion people are still living on \$1.25 a day. Is this really something to applaud?

The figures are constructs anyway, not head counts. They are derived from formulae based on population figures, purchasing power, dollar equivalents and other variables. Their assumptions are arbitrary: poverty thresholds in Europe and the US are five times as high. Recently, the development industry has made a fetish out of mathematical poverty, refining thresholds and methodologies and calling for an end to ‘extreme poverty’ by 2030. How on earth could attainment – even mathematically – be proved?

Later this year, the MDGs will be replaced with the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), consisting of a broader agenda with 169 targets compared to the MDGs’ modest 18. There is a full-scale debate about how they will be monitored and what this will cost: one estimate is \$254 billion, twice the current annual global aid budget.³ ‘If we want to end poverty, we need to be able to measure it properly,’ says Sabina Alkire, Director of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, busily promoting the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) her researchers have created – courtesy of aid.

The MPI has the merit of factoring into the definition of poverty ‘overlapping disadvantages’ faced by poor people, such as poor sanitation, hunger, and lack of education and healthcare, instead of only computing shortage of cash. This statement of the blindingly obvious takes one’s breath away, especially as many of the very poor live in an invisible, resource-based economy where cash transactions barely feature. You would expect poverty experts to know this.

The MPI will be like the Human Development Index, a breakthrough idea of 1990, whose variables the United Nations Development Programme has since spent several fortunes redefining. Measuring poverty has become more important ‘professionally’ than doing something about it. Data analysis is the development racket of our day. Who measures the anti-poverty contribution of the measurers?

Waving wands

No global agenda can transform the lives of seriously poor people. The idea that it could is a confection. Improvements in the lives of the poor can only happen on the ground. Action at the global level is confined to a supporting role, providing funds and forums to carry on policy debates and other exercises connected, sometimes tenuously, to practical action. No global stratosphere exists where wands can be waved that will miraculously short-cut the frustrating, difficult, incremental process

of poverty transformation where it has to take place.

Goals cannot tackle predicaments of exclusion, family breakdown, violence, exploitation, or the collapse of traditional protective systems and once-viable ways of life. Attempts to assist communities to overcome the worst problems they face, besides providing healthcare and education, and to design their own targets and agendas, are eclipsed. What happened to democracy and ‘people-centred’? Why have we forgotten that no development process succeeds unless the people it targets actively participate?

Regrettably, the Game of Goals supports the gravitational pull of the idea that the macro-level is where it’s at and that we in the privileged world can fix up people’s lives in ways they have not envisaged or asked for. In this scenario, the third of humanity living in poverty are players with non-speaking parts in the drama of socio-economic transformation as written by ourselves.

There is another way. Activities carried out in development’s name should be grounded in existing economic and social realities, build bridges to the mainstream, and recognize that local idiosyncrasies have the strongest influence over whether programmes to assist people out of poverty succeed or fail. We need to rediscover ‘small-scale’ and ‘diverse’, and ensure that ‘participatory’, ‘equitable’ and ‘just’ are fully in the picture.

Never mind the Game of Goals. Let it go on. But make sure also to trump illusion with reality. Let, as well, a thousand flowers bloom. ■

1 Sam Jones, ‘UN: 15-year push ends extreme poverty for a billion people’, *Guardian Global development*, 6 July 2015.

2 Jason Hickel, ‘The death of international development’, *Red Pepper*, February 2015.

3 Bjorn Lomborg, ‘Cost of gathering data on new development goals could be crippling’, *Guardian Global Development*, 25 September 2014.

International Development: Illusions and Realities by Maggie Black

Maggie Black is one of four *NoNonsense* titles published by NI in September 2015. The others are: *The Money Crisis: How bankers grabbed our money – and how we can get it back* by Peter Stalker;

Globalization: Buying and selling the world, by Wayne Ellwood; and *Renewable Energy: Cleaner, fairer ways to power the planet*, by Danny Chivers.

newint.org/books/nononsense



• Maggie Black has written a brilliant overview, comprehensive but succinct, radical but realistic, critical but balanced, and packed with striking and memorable evidence. It fills a gap in development writing.♦

Robert Chambers,
IDS Sussex

Rajendra Singh

Known as the 'water man', the one-time Ayurvedic doctor has bought rivers and communities back to life thanks to traditional rainwater harvesting techniques. DIONNE BUNSHA finds out more.

As a young Ayurvedic doctor, Rajendra Singh left his home town on the plains near Delhi and set out to practise in the poor, desolate villages of Alwar district in the deserts of Rajasthan in India. But a conversation with an old man from Alwar changed the course of his life and the fate of that region.

Seven months after Singh had moved to Alwar, the old man told him: 'We don't want your treatment and we don't want you to teach our children. We want water, that's all. If we get water, our health will improve, our farm animals will be taken care of and people will return to our village.'

After years of drought, the land was dry and barren. Several young men had left to work in the cities. 'The old man wanted to teach me an old system of water harvesting. He wanted me to spread the knowledge in the village,' Singh explains. This was the start of his transition from doctor to 'water man', as he is known locally.

His first experiment with harvesting rainwater was successful. After building earthen bunds (called *johads*) and cement check dams across the contour of a slope to arrest rainwater, they were able to store clean drinking water and recharge aquifers. 'We started harvesting rainwater and conserving it so that it wouldn't flow away and get wasted. We looked at the hydromorphology and contour of the land and designed structures appropriately,' says Singh. 'Within three years, we saw dramatic results. In the first year, the groundwater levels in the wells increased and soil erosion was reduced. The first goal was to address the shortage of drinking water. After that was done, people started farming with the water that remained.' Now, a variety of grains and pulses grow in what was once arid, abandoned land.

When the water came back, so did people. 'Migrants returned to their villages to farm their land. People in villages nearby started hearing about our results, and wanted to build *johads* in their villages too,' says Singh. With his co-workers at the Tarun Bharat Sangh (Young India Association), Singh walked from one village to the next, teaching people about these traditional techniques. 'Apart from water *yatrás* [tours], we also organized *pad yatrás* [walking tours] to talk about soil conservation, reforestation and seed conservation.'



Tarun Bharat Sangh Office

More than 4,000 *johads* were constructed across 8,600 square kilometres. Land that was once barren is now fertile and green. 'Seven rivers that had dried up came back to life. There's better rainfall because we increased the green cover of the land. With rainwater harvesting, prosperity returned to our villages,' says Singh. Forest cover has increased, and antelope and leopard have returned.

The results prompted some state governments to start rainwater harvesting schemes, with mixed results. 'The government has not created the right political atmosphere to make rainwater harvesting take off in a meaningful way. They have no inventory of all the bodies of water, and several powerful people have captured them. This privatization of water needs to stop in order for rainwater harvesting to be successful,' says Singh.

'At the international level, rainwater harvesting is being recognized as a solution for flood and drought, to mitigate the effects of climate change,' Singh continues. His work was recently recognized with the Stockholm Water Prize, the citation for which reads: 'Rajendra Singh's life work has been in building social capacity to solve local water problems through participatory action, empowerment of women, linking indigenous know-how with modern scientific and technical approaches and upending traditional patterns of development, resource use, and social norms.'

Now, Singh works at the international level to stop exploitation, pollution and encroachment on water. 'I have started a movement encouraging people to conserve water and use it more efficiently. Privatization of water should be stopped, and water should be managed by communities. We need to give new life to rivers. That's my life's goal,' he says.

Tarun Bharat Sangh's work has brought rivers and villages back to life. An old man's wisdom has come a long way, but only because Rajendra Singh listened and revived local knowledge. ■

Dionne Bunsha is an award-winning journalist and editor, working in Mumbai and Vancouver.

Puzzle Page by Axe

The crossword prize is a voucher for our online shop to the equivalent of \$30. Only the winner will be notified. Send your entries by 23 September to: New Internationalist Puzzle Page, The Old Music Hall, 106-108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JE, UK; fax to +44 1865 403346; or email a scan to: puzzlespage@newint.org

Winner for Crossword 202: Sylvia Hanley, Southsea, Hampshire, England.

Crossword 204

CRYPTIC Across

- One from Tokyo quietly left to be replaced by five from Jakarta (8)
- Downsized with sacking of head – it gets drawn out (6)
- Area of Normandy for rearing a pony to a certain span (6)
- Navigator's evacuation plan review in a wet area of the Blue Ridge Mountains (3,5)
- Negative votes meet positive voter resistance, man (8)
- Voice of a boy of three (6)
- Son's amazing tour, getting lost in the Iranian highlands (6,9)
- American's pain over being down at heel in Italy? (6)
- A male technician maybe holding a girl from Birmingham (8)
- Her pig is dancing to music about Rome, he wrote (8)
- Primarily, through gross Russian officious zoning, no youths are here in Chechnya (6)
- Move to Madrid before a spell in one of the Canaries (6)
- A hundred Handel composed, of the OT type (8)

CRYPTIC Down

- Pub makes a fuss setting up in old India (6)
- Many get drunk, arak going around a vessel in Ujung Pandang back in the day (8)
- Threat to establishment is now on at the borders of Surrey (6)
- Rice and vindaloo curry for the Renaissance Man (8,2,5)
- District of Nunavut anxious to embrace western, and not hot Thai, cooking (8)

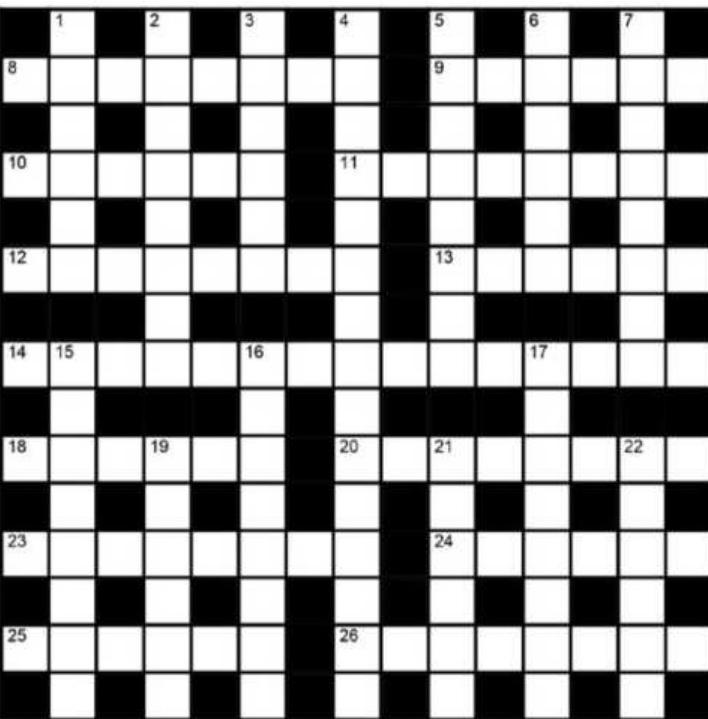
- Many you texted to annoy islands in dispute (6)
- Cartel's place is near the sea and river, set up to accommodate Lima (8)
- The French support application to detail sound waves in a layer of the atmosphere (8)
- Chinese harbour drug to send to sea (8)
- Snake one gets for a con and a murder (8)
- Check ally is holding up in the Arctic sea (6)
- Asian influence in pilaf Ghanaian samples (6)
- Directions found in articles scanned at first by Trojan exile (6)

QUICK Across

- Indonesian (8)
- Brought out (6)
- Part of Normandy and the Vendee typified by copses and hedgerows (6)
- Watercourse on the watershed of, and a tributary to, the Ohio R (3,5)
- Aggressive negative person (8)
- Boy soprano (6)
- Iranian uplands whose foothills provide most of the country's oil (6,9)
- Italian region, capital Bari (6)
- One from Dixie (8)
- Composer of the 'Pines of Rome' and the 'Fountains of Rome' (8)
- Capital of Chechnya (variant spelling) (6)
- One of the smallest of the Canary Islands (6)
- Aramaic speaker of Babylonia, like Abraham (8)

QUICK Down

- Ex-Indian princedom and city, now Vadodara (6)



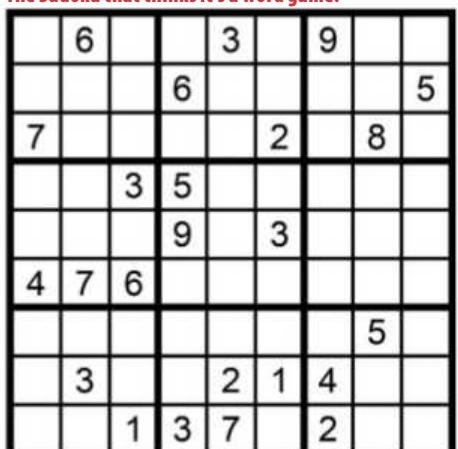
- Former name of Ujung Pandang, Indonesia (8)
- Apostasy (6)
- Rome's airport, alternatively named Fiumicino (8,2,5)
- Inuit district, 'The Blizzard of the North', as translated (8)
- N Pacific islands and cold current (6)
- Colombia's second city (8)
- Layer in the upper atmosphere which reflects short-wave radio waves to earth (8)
- Largest city of China, and – arguably – the world (8)
- N American town; S American monster! (8)
- Sea in the Arctic Ocean, north of Russia (6)
- Asian: coat made of sheepskin popular in the late 1960s (6)
- Name shared by Homer's refugee from Troy and a paralysed man in the book of Acts (6)

LAST MONTH'S SOLUTION

- Across:** 5/7 Sherwood Forest, 9 Diurnal, 10 Elbrus, 11 Chihuahua, 13 Clio, 14 Taiwan, 16 Atones, 18 York, 19 Barcelona, 22 Diktat, 23 Vulgate, 25 Ranker, 26 Smolensk.
- Down:** 1 Chadic, 2 Friuli, 3 Goan, 4 Asturias, 6 Delphi, 7 Fremantle, 8 Rubicon, 12 Ulan Bator, 14 Tropical, 15 Irkutsk, 17 Graves, 20 Ogaden, 21 At ease, 24 Leon.

Sudokey 50

The Sudoku that thinks it's a word game!



Now, using the key below, substitute letters for the numbers in the east-central block...

1=O; 2=A; 3=E; 4=N; 5=S; 6=M; 7=T; 8=R; 9=I

...and make as many words as you can of six letters or more from the nine letters in the keyword, the extra clue to which is: 'Christians in Lebanon hurt over damaged site'. You cannot use the same letter more than once, nor use proper nouns (excepting the keyword), slang, offensive words, abbreviations, participles or simple plurals (adding an 's' or 'es').

GOOD 60 words of at least six letters, including 15 of seven letters or more

VERY GOOD 70 words of at least six letters, including 20 of seven letters or more.

EXCELLENT 80 words of at least six letters, including 25 words of seven letters or more.

Last month's **Sudokey keyword**: 'Jutlander'

Solution to Wordsearch 48: The 16 mountain ranges were: Alps, Andes, Atlas, Cascades, Caucasus, Flinders, Grampians, Himalayas, Pamirs, Pyrenees, Rockies, Snowdonia, Taurus, Tien Shan, Urals, Zagros.

Wordsearch 50 Find the 19 oblasts (provinces) of the Russian Federation hidden here.



Mark Thomas

The comedian, author and activist talks to GRAEME GREEN about tax dodging, public spaces and committing 100 acts of minor dissent.

You just committed 100 acts of dissent for your new book. Is dissent more fun than protest?

They can be the same thing. Is it more fun? Yes. Protest is a tool. I think sometimes activists mistake the tool for the end objective. We get very defensive about our right to have a camp at Point A, when the camp is actually about climate change. It's quite simple: if someone says you can't use one tool, find another one.

Does dissent work?

Campaigning and dissenting is something that's so central to us as human beings that the possibility of existing in a world where it doesn't happen is just awful. When you see some people protesting, especially peace protesters, what I love is that some of them could not live with themselves if they weren't on that protest. It's a matter of conscience. And we've definitely had successes. I was proud to be part of the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) campaign at the Curzon cinemas that got workers there the living wage. I loved working with these young trade unionists who were really up for the struggle. It was like being re-energized. We've also had successes against Amazon, LoveFilm and others.

One of your big targets is tax-dodging companies. Why is that so important?

Central to the idea of inequality is fairness. The way the gap between rich and poor has increased is through the destruction of trade-union rights, privatization, attacks on the workforce, zero-hour contracts... Then on the other level, you see the rich having access to ways of getting even richer. A large part of that access is about the tax they pay and the tax

they can avoid paying as a corporation. It's hugely unjust. If you want to avoid paying tax, then don't use anything that is tax-funded. Don't use workers who've been educated by the state system. Don't use pavements. Don't use roads. Don't use the police. Don't use anything that's paid for by the tax-base of our collective endeavours.

Would you see your comedy as a failure if people didn't also get involved in political campaigns?

Yes. I did a show called The Manifesto where I asked the audience to come up with policy ideas and debate them. It goes beyond the traditional way of seeing an audience; they become participants whose values and views and ideals are of worth. People can join in. That's really important.

Do people have more power than we think?

Yes. People have a lot more power than we ever dreamed we'd have, and also, paradoxically, it always takes more effort to change things than we ever think it will. It's the wonderful paradox of being an activist: that we can do this stuff, but it really takes a lot of work.

In your new show, Trespass, you're looking at how public spaces are being taken over by corporations and private interests. Why is that happening?

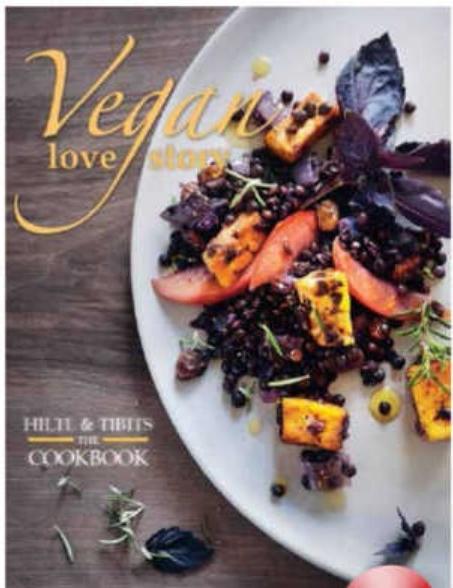
Companies and corporations like to control their environment. You can't demonstrate outside the Royal Bank of Scotland in London because



they own the land and will kick you off. And you think, 'well, that's mad, because one place that definitely needs demonstrating outside of is the Royal Bank of Scotland, and they've got the right to tell us we can't demonstrate!' For me, it's about looking at what we do in public spaces, how we play, what restrictions there are, how we view public spaces, how we view our freedoms and rights. I was in Oxford recently where they're thinking of bringing in public-space orders to ban feeding pigeons and sleeping rough on some streets, or buskers or pavement art. You think, 'hang on a second, this is just the dull, dead hand of control.' If you want to do something about rough sleeping, my suggestion would be that you don't criminalize it, but try to fight it at the source. It's about having public places where we can feel free and liberated. ■

100 Acts Of Dissent by Mark Thomas is out now, published by September Publishing. Mark's new show, *Trespass*, runs at the Edinburgh Festival until 30 August. markthomasinfo.com

Graeme Green is a journalist and photographer: @greengraeme



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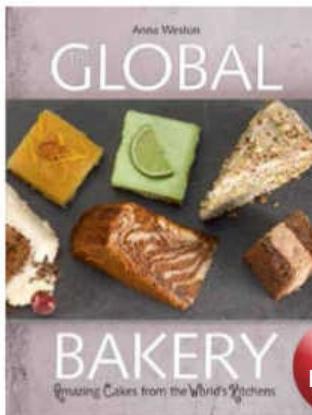
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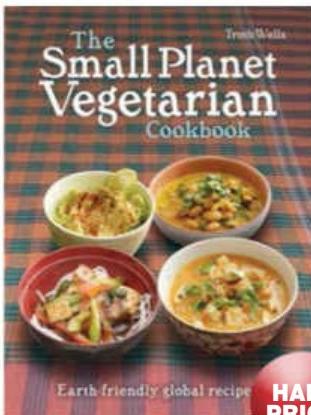


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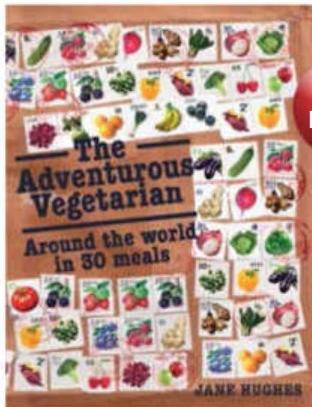


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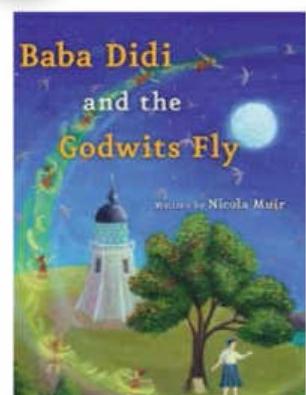


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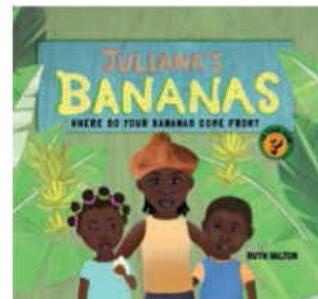
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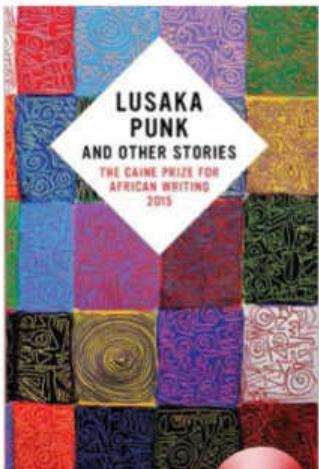
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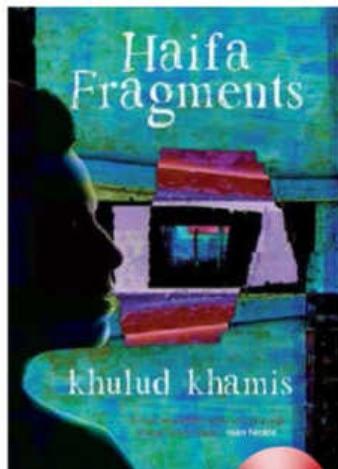
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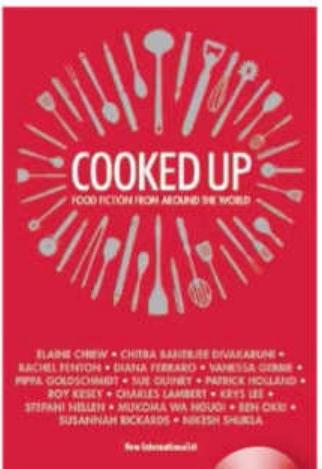
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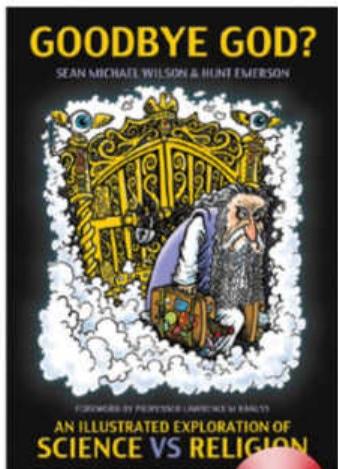
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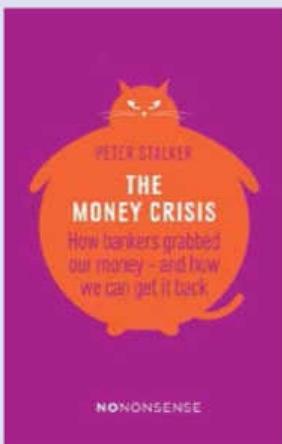
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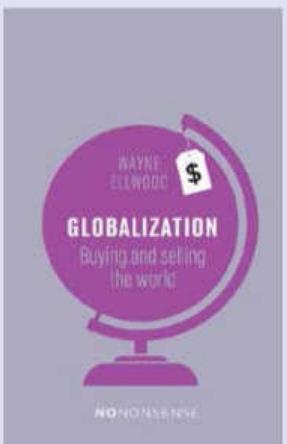
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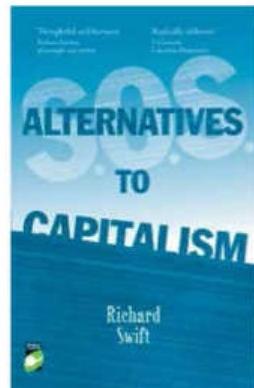
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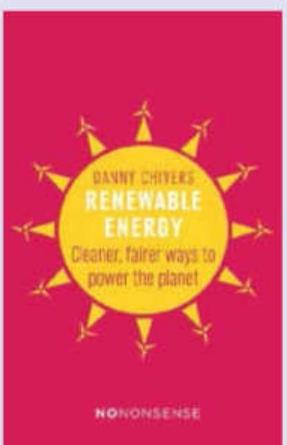
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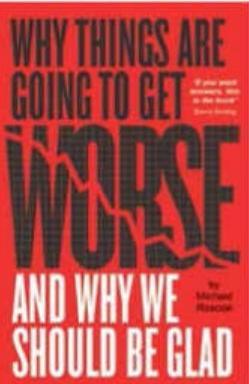
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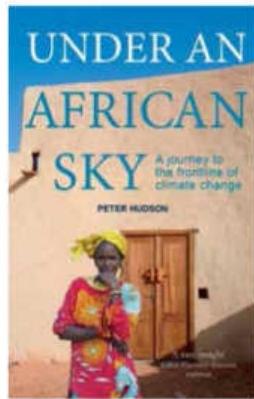
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